

THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
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THE STORY AS A CREATIVE MEDIUM IN THE WORK OF  
JOSEPH CONRAD.

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## PART I

### CONRAD'S METHODS OF WRITING

## INTRODUCTION.

### 1. First-Hand Sources of Research.

The student of Conrad has at his disposal a large body of facts and theories about Conrad's life, his personality, his mind and his art.

Joseph Conrad has left us rich biographical material. In A Personal Record he gives, in a discursive manner, a fragmentary account of his life. In The Mirror of the Sea, he gave expression to the dominating passion of his life, his love for the sea. In his Notes on Life and Letters and in the Last Essays, miscellaneous writings with a markedly personal approach to their subject-matter, he reveals his outlook on life, his beliefs and convictions, as apart from his work.

What is more important for our purpose however, is that in those writings, and more clearly in his Author's Notes (to the first Collected Edition, 1920, with the exception of the preface to the Nigger of the Narcissus), he presents us with his creed as an artist. His intimations are largely substantiated and supplemented by the testimony of his wife and a number of devoted and distinguished literary friends, and mainly by a wealth of letters. They reveal the nature of the intellectual and moral perceptions underlying his work, and provide valuable information about his difficulties, perplexities and aims as artist and man.

## 2. Survey of Conrad's Background as a Writer.

When already a famous writer, Conrad told a friend that 'he did not consider himself a literary man at all' (Mégroz, p.39), and, in A Personal Record (p.173), called himself 'the most unliterary of writers'. He was brought up on the sea, leading an essentially active life up to the age of thirty-eight, when he became an author. He did not however consider the writing of books as his true vocation. There were men with literary talent in his family. His father had shown a remarkable gift as writer and translator, but he died when Conrad was only a boy of eleven.

Books, according to Conrad's testimony, were the only companions of his lonely and gloomy childhood. After the death of his parents, he spent a few years at a Grammar School in Poland and went to France when he was not yet seventeen. For several years he stayed in Marseilles, went to sea in French sailing ships, and learnt French fluently. This gave him access to French fiction. Not until he was twenty-one did Conrad step on British soil, knowing but a few words of the language which he was wholly to adopt and to develop into such a splendid instrument of literary expression.

During the many years he spent at sea, as an officer in British sailing ships, he did a great amount of reading. He mentions Flaubert and Maupassant, who both compelled his admiration. On becoming a writer himself, and being in sore need of technical skill for his craft, he took them up again. Apart from his reading and the negligible influence it had on him as a writer, he was completely ignorant of the requirements of the craft of fiction when he took up his pen and started to write his first book, Almayer's Folly, with the aim of passing away his time whilst waiting for a command.

Conrad may have developed his gift as a story-teller during his life at sea. The solitude of many months on board sailing ships, the boredom in times of calm and of the long hours between the watches, forced the sailors to resort to the simplest means of entertainment: the telling of tales or the 'spinning of yarns', -simple art springing from life-. The respect paid by his companions to Marlow, -Conrad's mouthpiece and disguise in a number of stories and novels-, shows that the good story-teller was a desirable companion on long cruises. According to their manner of life, the yarns of simple sailors would deal with the sea and their ships, and they would essentially contain action. In the preface to 'Typhoon' Conrad writes: 'Men earning their bread in any very specialized occupation will talk shop, not only because it is the most vital interest of their lives but also because they have not much knowledge of other subjects'. It is reasonable to suppose that Conrad, once he took up his pen, would tell tales of action and adventure, based on his own experience as well as on the simple tales of hearsay he had in store.

Although Conrad made ample use of these tales of hearsay he did not adopt the simple manner in which they were offered to him. Talking about Marlow he states:

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of those misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

(Heart of Darkness, p.55)

But even so, we can safely assume that during his life at sea, his natural gift as a story-teller found an outlet and was cultivated.



We have the unanimous testimony of Conrad's friends that he was a fascinating and charming story-teller, able to keep them enthralled by his power of words, and the dramatic pose and gesture of the man involved in his tale. In 1891 John Galsworthy, then a young man, met Conrad on board the sailing ship 'Torrens', where the latter had his last command. Galsworthy recalls that meeting:

Ever the great teller of a tale, he had already nearly twenty years of tales to tell. Tales of ships and storms, of Polish revolution..of the Malay seas, and the Congo; and of men and men...

On that ship he told of life, not literature, and it is not true that I introduced him to the life of letters. ..I remember feeling that he outweighed for me all the other experiences of that voyage. Fascination was Conrad's great characteristic - the fascination of vivid expressiveness and zest, of his far-ranging, subtle mind.

(Aubry II, p.153)

On the occasion of a meeting of Conrad with his first publisher Edward Garnett relates:

Mr. Fisher Unwin's efforts to interest his guest in... literary figures .. were as successful as an attempt to thread an eyeless needle. Conrad, extremely polite, grew nervously brusque in his responses, and kept shifting his feet one over the other.

(Garnett, Letters fr. Conrad, p.XIX)

Conrad himself states emphatically that, concerning his subject-matter as well as his technical skill, he was entirely unprepared for his task when he settled down to write novels. Edward Garnett relates:

When on several occasions in those early years I praised his psychological insight he questioned seriously whether he possessed such a power and deplored the lack of opportunities for intimate observation that a sailor's life had offered him.

'Nothing of the kind has ever come my way! I have spent half my life knocking about in ships, only getting on shore between voyages. I know nothing, nothing! except from outside. I have to guess at everything!'

(Garnett, Letters fr. Conrad, p.XIX)

On another occasion he explicitly states that he never looked for experience with a view to literary communication:

I never made a note of a fact, of an impression or an anecdote in my life. The conception of a planned book was entirely outside of my mental range when I sat down to write; the ambition of being an author had never turned up amongst those gracious imaginary existences one creates fondly for oneself at times in the stillness and immobility of a day-dream.

(A Personal Record, Chapter IV)

In the same book he tells us that he 'could never bring himself to look upon his existence and experience .. as only so much material for his hands' (pp.9-10), but he also admits:

La vie que j'ai passée à travers le vaste monde se trouve dans mes livres. Je ne cherchais pas une carrière; mais il se peut que, sans le savoir, je cherchais des impressions.

(Lettres Françaises, à K.Waliszewski, déc.5,1903,p.60)

This means that although he did not consciously look for impressions for the sake of literary communication, he nevertheless looked at the world with the eyes of an artist.

After Almayer's Folly was published in 1895, Edward Garnett, Mss. Fisher and Unwin's reader, who had highly commended the book, encouraged him to write 'another' (preface to Outcast). Subsequently he became Conrad's 'literary father' and his most loyal friend. Forced by adverse circumstances to stay on shore, Conrad took up his pen again, -still as an amateur writer-, and so, almost by mere chance, became a professional. He held a shipmaster's certificate, and for years he tried, with the help of devoted friends, to obtain a command. Not until every chance had gone did he resign himself to a sedentary life. It was necessity as much as vocation which made Conrad the sailor a famous author.

When setting about to become a professional writer, Conrad was inspired by that same strong ambition to make a career which had given him the strength to become a ship-master. He brought a stern sense of duty from his life at sea into his writing life, carrying an unswerving fidelity to his 'notions of good service' like an 'article of creed from the decks of ships to the more circumscribed space of his desk'. (A Personal Record, pp. XVIII-XIX). When he found himself committed to making a living by his pen he confessed to Garnett:

I am appalled at the absurdity of my situation - at the folly of my hopes, at the blindness that had kept me up in my gropings. Most appalled to feel that all the doors behind me are shut and that I must remain where I have come blundering in the dark.

(Garnett, Letters fr. Conrad, p.135)

The publication of Conrad's first books involved a loss for his publishers. The majority of the copies of Almayer's Folly rested for years on the booksellers' shelves', and the 'title long remained a jest in the trade' at the 'expense of Mr. Fisher Unwin's town traveller' (Garnett, Pref.) For years Conrad lived in bitter poverty, unable to keep pace with the most modest expenses, afflicting and exasperating his friends with dark allusions, admitting to Garnett that 'between those nearest and dearest to him and the bleakest want there was only his pen'; (Aubry I, p.280) he was filled with constant dread of the future and often reverted into states of black despondency. In 1908, when the bulk of his best work was already written and published, -four years after the publication of Nostromo-, Conrad was almost hopelessly indebted to his literary agent, J.B. Pinker.

But more than from poverty Conrad suffered from ill-health. After his African adventure, -his disastrous trip to the Congo-, which was to yield such marvellous literary fruit, Conrad's health was permanently undermined. He was tormented by intermittent fits of Malaria and fre-

quent attacks of gout, which often paralysed the wrist of his right hand and made writing impossible.

In addition to poverty and ill-health and partly caused by it, Conrad suffered from an almost intolerable mental strain: a blankness of mind and paralysis of expression, a peculiar sterility of his imagination. The creative act was therefore a constant agony for him; he struggled for many years to complete the Rescue, for which he had to invent the entire action, crying out for images, -for the power to 'see'. Finally he had to lay it aside till the end of his life. When writing Nostromo, he -wrestled with the Lord for twenty months, in complete seclusion'. (Nostromo, p.X)

All this shattered Conrad's self-confidence and gave him the haunting belief 'that he could not write'; that he was a 'failure from the worldly point of view' (Letters fr. Conrad, pp.42-44); it filled him with bitterest resentment against his profession, so that he called it 'un art trop difficile' (Lettres Franç., p.62), or 'un métier de chien', 'a game that is not worth the candle' (Letters fr. Conrad, p.156). The 'sight of an inkpot and a penholder filled him with rage and disgust', and at times his sorry plight moved him to hysterical outbursts or tore a cry of despair from him:

I have been living in a little hell of my own; in a place of torment so subtle and so cruel and so unavodable that the prospect of theological damnation in the hereafter has no more terrors for me. When I face that fatal manuscript it seems to me I have forgotten how to think - worse, how to write.

It is as if something in my head had given way to let in a cold grey mist. I knock about blindly in it till I am positively, physically sick - and then I give up saying - tomorrow! And tomorrow comes - and brings only the renewed and futile agony. I ask myself whether I am breaking up mentally. I am afraid of it.

(Letters fr. Conrad, pp.42-44)

Conrad collapsed several times, and for weeks and months was then unable to write. But this unceasing struggle with disease, with crushing material difficulties, with the 'evasion of words' and the 'intangible resistance of his imagination' could never sap 'that kind of desperate energy of which many of his creations bear the mark - creations which are only the visible projection of his nature, and of the inward warfare that he never ceased to wage' (Aubry I, p.162).

In a moment of aloofness from his personal troubles he declared to Garnett that:

'... in art alone there is a meaning in endeavour as apart from success..., the truth that saves us from eternal damnation'. (Letters fr. Conrad, p.102, first pref. to Nigger, cut out by Garnett)

The seaman's stern sense of duty towards his craft turns out again, when he compares the

.. intimacy and strain of a creative effort in which mind and will and conscience are engaged to the full, hour after hour, day after day, away from the world, and to the exclusion of all that makes life really lovable and gentle...

with the hard strain of life at sea:

For that too is the wrestling of the men with the might of their Creator, in a great isolation from the world, without the amenities and consolations of life, a lonely struggle under a sense of overmatched littleness, for no reward that could be adequate, but for the mere winning of a longitude...

(A Personal Record, pp. 98-101)

The extent to which the man of action felt himself chained down to his writing desk is revealed in a letter to a friend:

Mes livres m'ont trop coûté pour que je les aime. Je vais à ma tâche quotidienne comme le forçat à son labeur, parce qu'il le faut. La vie est un dur maître.

(Lettres Franç., p.107, à Joseph de Smet, jan.9, 1911)

Conrad the artist and man was highly perceptive and sensitive, and therefore open to an excessive realization of his adversities. Ford Madox Ford states that 'few men can have so much suffered'. (A Personal Remembr., p.255)





### 3. Conrad's Standing as a Novelist.

The tremendous toil and suffering which was the price paid by Conrad for the creation of most of his books can but increase the value of his achievement and compels the critic to approach his work with due respect.

Many of Conrad's books drew enthusiastic praise from distinguished novelists of his time and brought him their lasting friendship. On the strength of their competent judgment alone, Conrad's position as one of the greatest novelists in English literature can be considered as firmly established. It is further enhanced by his influence on notable writers and poets such as Ford Madox Ford, Santayana, T.S.Eliot, Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway or Graham Greene, to mention only a few.

Two out of a number of moving tributes paid to his art may serve as a measure of his achievement. Henry James, an acknowledged master of the craft of fiction, wrote in appreciation of The Mirror of the Sea:

But the book itself is a wonder to me really - for it's so bringing home the prodigy of your past experiences .. No one has known - for intellectual use - the things you know, and you have, as the artist of the whole matter, an authority that no one has approached. Nothing you have done has more in it. The root of the matter of saying. You stir me, in fine, to amazement and you touch me to tears, and I thank the powers who so mysteriously let you look with such sensibilities, into such an undiscovered country - for sensibility.

(Letter to Conrad, 1st Nov. 1906)

E.V. Lucas wrote in appreciation of the same book:

Your book has made me very sad - as all beautiful works of art do. It is so beautiful and so wise that I don't know what to say about it. I don't mind confessing that I cried a little as I read it .. you have made me so restless. I don't know what to do. This tedious solid land...

(Letter to Conrad, 9th Oct. 1906)

When the volume Youth was published (containing 'Youth', 'Heart of Darkness' and 'The End of the Tether'), George Gissing wrote to a friend:

Read Conrad's new book. He is the strongest writer - in every sense of the word - at present publishing in English. Marvellous writing. The other men are mere scribblers in comparison. That a foreigner should write like this, is one of the miracles of literature.

(Garnett, Prefaces, p.3)

Such testimonies are numerous, and although tears may have flown more readily at that time, they bear sufficient proof of the excellence of Conrad's gifts as a writer of fiction to rank him among the great masters of that craft. Recent appreciations of his work prove that nowadays too, most critics fully acknowledge its outstanding qualities:

True, Conrad enjoyed a vogue in the early nineteen-twenties, when he was bringing out a series of inferior novels; and he had been for some time an established name. But - for all the odd success of Chance - he had too good reason to feel that he was regarded as the author of Lord Jim; the writer of stories about the sea, the jungle and the islands, who had made some curious ventures outside his beat, but would yet, one hoped, return to it. Perhaps what may be found against his name in the new Concise Cambridge History of English Literature gives what is still the prevalent view.

But he was not only by far the greatest of the Edwardians; there is more to be said than that. Scott, Thackeray, Meredith and Hardy are commonly accounted great English novelists: if the criterion is the achievement in work addressed to the adult mind, and capable as such of engaging again and again its full critical attention, then Conrad is certainly a greater novelist than the four enumerated. This, which may seem a more striking claim to some critics than to others, is merely a way of insisting on the force of the judgment that Conrad is among the very greatest novelists in the language - or any language.

(F.R.Leavis, The Great Tradition, pp.225-226)

#### 4. Conrad and the Public.

##### a) The Public's Attitude towards Conrad's Work.

As late as 1913, with Chance, popularity came to Conrad and brought him affluence. Public favour was however not granted to him for his best work 'but rested mainly on later books, like Chance and Victory, which made fairly liberal concessions to readers who expected novels to deal exclusively with lovers' (Wiley, p.3). Edward Garnett relates that:

Nineteen years of arduous work (1895-1913) failed to bring him into real popularity. It was not the fault of the reviewers. His work was too 'exotic' for British insular taste. From the first he received eulogistic notices, and probably the figure of the lady on the 'jacket' of Chance did more to bring the novel into popular favour than the long review by Sir Sidney Colvin in The Observer.

In recent years changes in popular taste have led to a steady growth of Conrad's fame. It is therefore evident 'that there is a quality in his vision which continues to excite the modern mind' (Wiley, p.6). But as yet Conrad's work as a whole, apart from a short vogue in the twenties, has never enjoyed universal popular favour. This has been ascribed to various reasons, -to the fact that he was constantly labelled as a writer of exotic stories and adventures of the sea; that in this superficial way of classifying the originality of his approach to his subject-matter, and the strangeness and intensity of his vision, the deeper layers of his work were ignored; that the misapprehension arising from this classification unduly limited the circle of his readers. Conrad himself shared this view and rebuked his devoted friend Richard Curle so sternly for contributing

to this misunderstanding in an article, that they were in consequence temporarily estranged. Towards the end of his life, as late as 1923, Conrad again complained to Curle about this matter, suggesting that he should write an article which would explain to the public that 'his stories expand far beyond their frame and appeal to no special public - looking for exotism, or adventure, or the sea' (Aubry, II, p.326). Since then it has become a stock-item of Conrad-criticism to refute this limited view of his work.

In spite of his anxieties about the mistaken critical appreciations in question, Conrad himself ascribed little significance to subject-matter in itself:

Subjects in themselves never appear revelatory to me, if only because subjects are, so to speak, common property, lying about on the common ground for one man after another to pick up and handle. That is what makes a subject such an insignificant thing, and also invests it with the potentiality of almost infinite suggestion. It depends really on him who picks it up.

Although the use of his own experience as subject-matter was a necessity for Conrad, he still had, within its range, the possibility of a choice for his creative activity. The quality of the formed subject-matter 'depends really on him who picks it up'. What then is not interesting to the general reader is not Conrad's subject-matter in itself, but the use he made of it, -the quality of the expression which he gave to his impressions-. Although, in an objective view, it is the quality of the expression alone which determines the value of a work of art, we must take into account that the general reader may bring a fixed interest to his reading. He may, by habit of reading, connect a certain subject-matter with certain determined qualities of content and expression, and may expect to find them in that subject-matter. Conrad may have failed then to give those qualities



to his subject-matter, -which remains to be examined.

As the example of many writers, of Captain Marryat, of Stevenson or of C.S. Forester in our day proves, stories of the sea were ever favourites with Anglo-Saxons on either side of the ocean. These writers do not possess Conrad's power of vision or style, but their novels are superior to his in their elementary aspect, -the simple presentation of the story. Rudyard Kipling and Robert Louis Stevenson, both contemporaries of Conrad, writing mainly stories of adventure, enjoyed great popularity and were scorned by Conrad because of the concessions they made to the taste of the general reading public. Even their boys' books were favourites with adult readers. Compared with Conrad's work, their novels are simple in outline, structure and vision, and, from the point of view of simplicity, a popular novel like Treasure Island has no equal in Conrad's work, although the latter strove for a life-time to write such a book.

The explanation of his failure to secure general public approval, -above all for what, from a purely literary point of view, might be considered as his most valuable work-, seems to lie in his manner of presentation, -in method and structure-, as well as in his peculiar vision, and not in his subject-matter.

Conrad was largely unaware that those qualities which lift his stories and novels above the level of mere sea-tales were not appreciated by the general reader, and he was deceived when he thought that the reader failed to see them. The story of the sea and adventure did not fail to attract the reader, but its very lack, where he had good reason to expect it, repelled him, and the more so since he could not appreciate what was offered to him instead.

b) Conrad's Attitude towards the Public as Concerning  
his Work.

Apart from his material dependance on the voice of the public, which declares itself in sale-numbers, Conrad really did care for public success, although he was incorruptible as an artist. We have ample proof that he regarded public favour as requisite to artistic success. He did not think of art as something beyond public appreciation, but considered it, on the contrary, as the ultimate justification of his endeavour. Edward Garnett relates:

I recall that Conrad took alarm at some declaration of mine about the necessity for a writer to follow his own path and disregard the public's taste. His tone was emphatic. 'But I won't live in an attic!' he retorted, 'I'm past that, you understand?' I saw then that it was essential to reassure Conrad about the prospects of Almayer's Folly. And I cited the names of authors who, whatever they may have been doing, were certainly not then living in attics, public favourites such as Stevenson and Kipling and Rider Haggard...

(Letters fr. Conrad, p.XIII)

Such, at the outset of his writing life, was Conrad's attitude towards the public. But his books demand as much serious thought of the reader as they offer entertainment. His vision was perhaps too startling, and his forebodings too ominous for the general reader of his time. He was highly praised by critics, but not appreciated by the general public. When his books failed to sell for many years and the circumstances of his life became fatal, he burst out into bitter and resentful accusations against it:

People don't want intelligence. It worries them - and they demand from their writers as much subserviency as from their footmen, if not rather more.

(To Norman Douglas, 18th Oct. 1905, Aubry II, p.24)

Le public introuvable is only introuvable simply because it is all humanity. And no artist can give it what it wants because humanity doesn't know what it wants. But it will swallow everything .. It is an ostrich, a clown, a giant, a bottomless sack. It is sublime. It has apparently no eyes and no entrails, like a slug, and yet it can weep and suffer.

(To John Galsworthy, 1st Nov. 1910, Aubry II, p.121)

.. car enfin le public est si bête qu'il faut lui montrer le soleil du doigt pour qu'il puisse comprendre que cela luit.

(To H.D. Davray, 22 Aout, 1903, L'ettres Françaises)

You may not like a full close - but the ordinary reader expects it. And the ordinary reader also wants the nail hit on the head before his eyes very simply in order that he should see the nail. Later on you will realize the inconceivable stupidity of the common reader - the man who forks out the half-crown.

(To Norman Douglas, 29th Feb. 08, Aubry II, p.68)

In this fatal situation, the temptation to sacrifice his artistic integrity for the mere necessities of life was great for Conrad. It is embodied in his work as the temptation of material interests, which is the main source of evil in human life and destroys the moral integrity of many characters. He was constantly compelled to re-assert his artistic self against the doubts thrown on his achievement by the indifference of the public, and to resist the temptation of material success as well:

X  
Ah! my dear, you don't know what an inspiration-killing anxiety it is to think: 'Is it salable?' There is nothing more cruel than to be caught between one's impulse, one's act, and that question, which for me simply is a question of life and death.....

I suppose there is something in me that is unsympathetic to the general public, -because the novels of Hardy, for instance, are generally tragic enough and gloomily written too, -and yet they have sold in their time and are selling to the present day. Foreignness, I suppose.

(To John Galsworthy, 6th Jan.08, Aubry II, p.65)

Apart from his worries about his vision, Conrad was well aware of the lack of certain elements of subject-matter and form in his work which made its reading less interesting and difficult for the ordinary reader:

As I've told you my mind runs much on popularity now. I would try to reach it .. by means of taking a widely discussed subject for the text of my novel .. my idea is to treat those subjects in a novel with a sufficiently interesting story ...

(To J.B.Pinker, 18th May 1907, Aubry II, p.49)

All the stories (A Set of Six) are stories of incident-action - not of analysis. All are dramatic in a measure but by no means of a gloomy sort. All, but two, draw their significance from the love interest - though of course they are not love stories in the conventional meaning. They are not studies - they touch no problems. They are just stories in which I've tried my best to be simply entertaining.

(To (Sir) Algernon Methuen, 26th Jan. 1908, Aubry II, p.66)

In a letter to a friend, written towards the end of his life, Conrad betrays his exasperation about that aspect of his fiction which had apparently been the cause of his greatest difficulties:

.. they will not only fail to understand, but they won't see at all. For it isn't a 'story'.

(To Richard Curle, 17th July, 1923, Aubry II, p.321)

Notwithstanding his occasional fierce sneers in times of depression, Conrad's fundamental attitude towards the public was unchanged at the climax of his writing life. In 1911, when the bulk of his best work was already written and he laboured under the burden of crushing debts, he wrote to Garnett that he 'does believe' that 'the control of the public's (audience, readers) attention is in a sense the beginning and end of artistic method'. (Letters, p.240)

In view of the whole of Conrad's attitude towards the reading public the following statement to a friend must be regarded as one of the many and varied shades and touches of flattery on Conrad's palette:

One writes for a chosen little group - in my case a bare half-dozen men, of whom the last fifteen years, you have been one. The public comes in or stays away - and really it does not matter.

(To Arnold Bennett, 29th Jan. 1914, Aubry II, p.151)

In the preface to Chance he writes:

What I always feared most was drifting unconsciously into the position of a writer for a limited coterie; a position which would have been odious to me as throwing a doubt on the soundness of my belief in the solidarity of all mankind in simple ideas and in sincere emotions. Regarded as a manifestation of criticism (for it would be outrageous to deny the general public the possession of a critical mind) the reception was very satisfactory.

(Prefaces, p.149)

In view of the rest of Conrad's statements as to this matter, and of the realities of his writing-life, these two contradictory passages contain much irony. They are symptomatic for the ambiguity of his attitude concerning essential aspects of his outlook in life and fiction.

Nobody seems to have been more surprized by the short vogue of popularity which part of Conrad's work enjoyed in the early twenties than the writer himself:

I have this morning received a two-pages-and-a-half criticism from the editor of the Dial under the ominous caption, 'A Popular Novel'. And it was not meant ironically. I never dreamt that such a thing would happen to me.

(To F.N.Doubleday, 2nd June 1924, Aubry II, p.344)



On the whole we can say that Conrad strove for popularity but was unable to meet the taste of the public and to keep in accord with his notions of good art at the same time. Even if we take the difference between the interest and the appreciation of the trained critic and that of the ordinary reader into account, admitting that from the point of view of art Conrad's work may have rare merits, the fact nevertheless remains that he failed to achieve the aim he had set himself. If we draw a comparison with Shakespeare's achievement, to make our point clear, we can state that Shakespeare succeeded in satisfying both the grounding and the exigent spectator or reader, -to give dramatic action and food for deep thought at the same time-. Considering the high praise lavished on Conrad's work from literary quarters as opposed to its lack of appeal for the public, it is easy to perceive that Conrad may have neglected the elementary level of his writings. We have seen that he was clearly aware of this fact.

We shall try to establish in this critical examination whether Conrad was incapable of finding a remedy for his shortcomings, or whether he merely sacrificed elementary requirements of his craft for the sake of achieving excellence in its higher aspects. Finally we shall evaluate his achievement as such from the point of view of good fiction.

## 5. Usage of Literary Terms.

Before we start our investigation we shall try to define the terms which we shall use in our discussion of the technical aspects of Conrad's work.

We consider the novel as an attempt at a representation of a piece of life. In a good novel this piece is pregnant with symbolic meaning and representative for the whole of life. It is life caught in the mirror of the artist's mind and condensed in the focus of language. It is experience filtered through his mind, coloured through his temper and composed to a coherent image through his imagination. It can therefore not be a copy of life, but is rather an imitation, in a peculiar sense. The novelist condenses his experience of life by selecting significant exemplary instants, - the 'telling facts' -, and composing them to a meaningful whole. The significance put in this way upon a certain range of facts is, from the entirely personal point of view of the author, a value-judgment, if the latter is honest with himself and does not write a priori with an eye on the conventional, popular, money-earning values. This Conrad explicitly refused to do on many occasions, with fierce sneers at contemporary writers.

Whether we can comprehend and survey a novel as a whole and <sup>a unit</sup> one, as different from the complexity of real life, depends essentially on the author's skill of selection and composition, - on his ability to arrange and order the parts of his narrative so that they can be seen coherently -. This enables us to perceive the inner meaning of the essential facts of life without the confusing veil of its manifold appearances, to perceive

the coherence of time and place, course and order of the events taking place in them, of the motives propelling the action, and of the thoughts and moods of the agents.

a) Method, Technique, Structure.

The 'conditio sine qua non' of any novel is its credibility. Even if an author creates fancy-worlds, completely different from the world familiar to us, he still pretends to depict some sort of real life. This pretence of truthfulness, -the creation of an illusion of reality-, is the indispensable condition of keeping the reader's interest alive. All method <sup>or</sup> ~~of~~ the craft of fiction is therefore a device to achieve this primary aim : to bounce the reader into acceptance of this illusion (Forster, p.77), to make the narrative convincing and the spectacle depicted look like real life.

The author may in his own person stand for the authenticity of the matter recorded, either as a character at its centre or as a mere onlooker or showman on the verge. He may charge one or several of the characters with the task of relating the narrative and of bearing testimony to the truth of his tale, -fathering the responsibility upon them by showing us the whole through their eyes from inside the scene-. He may also show it in retrospect through the mind and memory of one or several characters. He may use several of these methods in turn. In any of these cases he may stand aloof and depict the whole objectively, -let his matter speak on its own authority-, or he may take the reader into his confidence, creating an atmosphere of intimacy which involves the latter

directly. He may assume the part of Providence and guide the threads of fate wisely, or he may leave us completely in the dark as to the acts and intentions of the characters beside the one who is telling his tale.

The characters in a novel may be defined by their direct and indirect expressions, -behaviour and speech-; that is, the characters are shown. Their present behaviour may be explained and substantiated by the elucidation of their past, -their history in retrospect-. Both present behaviour and past experience may be shown from outside, -by mere action and speech-, or the characters' minds may be analysed, for the sake of tracing the motives of their present behaviour.

The arrangement of these indirectly relevant parts of the narrative along with the direct action requires some grouping, which we shall call technique. The final structure of a novel is the result of the application of method and technique, and, along with the author's power of verbal expression, determines the quality of its impact as a whole. The genius of an author declares itself primarily in his command of words, -in other words, in the intimate expression of his individual vision, if he has one-, which no doubt will make the single parts of his narrative more convincing than any technical device. Style and structure in a book are the expression of one creative mind and will therefore, as a rule, correspond to each other in value. It is the skill of the artist to so order the parts of his narrative that they produce the strongest impression possible on the reader by their density and compactness, which determines the ultimate value of a novel to a great extent. The skill of the craftsman must equal the genius of the artist in order to make the work of art

as effective as possible, and to bring it nearest to perfection. Lack of skill may frustrate the innate power of the artist.

b) Story, Plot, Characters, Atmosphere.

As a painting may be clear or hazy and blurred in outline and colour, so a novel can be compact and easy to survey, or it can be a confusing medley of facts, impressions and reflections. The manner of composition of a novel endows it with a certain form, an inner structure and coherence. Like the visual patterns of a carpet, each novel has intrinsic patterns with more or less defined qualities. What are these patterns?

The outstanding features of a novel are the events recorded, the action. The pattern of coherent action and events we call the story.

The actors in most cases are human beings, and before they act, they think and feel and desire and will. They may be compelled to act by some outer or inner force which is beyond their control. Whether they act or are acted upon, everything they do or which occurs to them is preceded and followed by sensations, emotions, feelings and thoughts, which mostly again result in action. All acts then, whether they spring from inside the characters or result from outer influence, are motivated in or outside the characters and have effects on them.

This chain of motivation with the thought and emotion it implies, -the chain of cause and effect which is used to make us feel an inevitable logic in the cause of events-, can again be considered as a coherent pattern. We call it the plot.



Story and plot, -act and motive-, are the components of the characters. The plot mainly takes shape inside the characters, who, therefore, can be considered as the nuclei of the plot.

From this follows that the quality and manner of character-delineation depends on the stress put on either of these two aspects. If the story is strongly developed, -as in the novel of action-, the characters are built up from outside, -shown by act, behaviour and speech-. If the plot overweighs, -as in the analytic novel-, they are revealed from inside through explanation.

Like man, the characters in a novel, in order to be convincing and credible, must live in a world with definite features. Action requires time and place as well as an agent and a motivation. The agents need a setting, -a scene for their acts-, as well as particular conditions of life for their mind and soul. There must be a concrete setting as well as intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, -a landscape for the body and soul of the agents.

The intellectual, spiritual and moral atmosphere in which they breathe can be explained, at length, in the form of separate comments. In the worst case they may split up the unity and coherence of the narrative. At best, they can be so subtly stated that they are imperceptibly interwoven in the fabric of the whole, -a colouring texture-. It is self-evident that this latter aspect of the novel is the most appropriate for conveying the author's personal views and tendencies. E.M. Forster holds that :

'... the artist's personality, when he has one, is conveyed through nobler agencies (than the story, such as the characters or the plot or his comments on life'.

(Aspects of the Novel, pp. 40-41)

The unity and compactness of all these aspects of the novel, -that is the simplicity and strength of their communication-, depend largely on the technical skill of the writer. But the vigour and intensity of his writing depends most of all on his power of verbal expression. It permeates his book and gives it the indelible mark of his personality. Structure and vision, technical skill and command of language, craft and intuition, all are the creative expression of one mind and temperament, and therefore intrinsically coherent and mostly equivalent.

c) The Story.

The story, as we have seen, is the most elementary aspect of the novel. Whether it is intended to bring out an inherent meaning or not, it is a simple means of entertainment,-that aspect of the novel which for the simple reader will be of the greatest interest and for the learned critic of the lowest-.E.M. Forster defines it as 'a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence' (p.29), and holds the view that 'it is the lowest and simplest of literary organisms' (p.29), but he is compelled to concede : 'Yet it is the highest factor common to all the very complicated organisms known as novels' (p.29). It 'only runs like a backbone, or .. a tape-worm' (p.28) through the complex fabric of the novel, and ought to be the most obvious and telling pattern according to those novelists who first of all consider the novel as a means of entertainment.

In its own right the story has only one purpose : it must entertain the reader. Forster states :

' Qua story, it can only have one merit : that of making the audience want to know what happens next. And conversely it can only have one fault : that of

making the audience not want to know what happens next. These are the only two criticisms that can be made on the story that is a story. (p.29)

The story in a novel has then a double allegiance : first, it must stand in its own right, -it has to keep the reader's attention and to satisfy his curiosity -. Secondly, it has to serve as a vessel for the other aspects of the novel. It must be told for its own sake, and yet is used for a purpose beyond it, at the same time.

In order to learn what a story should be like in a novel of average standing, -one that does not lay claim to any particular artistic distinction and is consequently enjoyed and favoured by the ordinary reader -, we must turn to authors who wrote such novels, -authors of average mind and conventional views -. F.R. Leavis calls them the 'Trollopes' of the novel. In order to get the quintessence of their views we had then best turn for advice to Trollope. In his Autobiography Trollope tells us that he considered novel-writing simply as a way to make much money if properly done, and therefore <sup>he</sup> aimed at high sale-numbers. He relates that sometimes he was writing in railway-carriages whilst travelling in the course of his professional duties. Conrad seems to refer to this when he states : 'Some men, I have heard, write in railway-carriages.' (A Personal Record, p.19) It does not seem far-fetched to suppose that Conrad knew Trollope's 'Autobiography'. He tells us that it was probably one of Trollope's books which he read on the night before starting to write Almayer's Folly. (A Personal Record, p.19) Trollope was very popular in his day, not only because he dealt with contemporary society and respected its views and values, nor, because he intentionally restricted his

range of thought and subject-matter to the quality of mind of the average reader, but also, and partly resulting from this attitude, because his novels were simple in their whole manner of presentation. The recent revival of his popularity seems to indicate that the modern reader is appreciating this quality of the novel anew.

In his Autobiography, the publication of which gave a stunning blow to Trollope's popularity because of its utilitarian views and lack of artistic ethos, he gave advice to young aspiring authors, in order to provide them with such rules of their craft as would enable them 'to fill their three-volume-novels with good writing'. First their calling must declare itself. (Trollope sometimes confuses the terms plot and story, using one for the other)

The novelist's first novel will generally have sprung from the right cause... He sits down and tells his story because he has a story to tell, as you, my friend, when you have heard something which has at once tickled your fancy or moved your pathos, will hurry to tell it to the first person you meet.

I have from the first felt sure that the writer when he sits down to commence his novel, should do so, not because he has to tell a story, but because he has a story to tell. (p.206)

A novel should give a picture of common life enlivened by humour and sweetened by pathos. To make that picture worthy of attention, the canvass should be crowded with real portraits, not of individuals known to the world or to the author, but of created personages impregnated with traits of character which are known to my thinking; the plot is but the vehicle without passengers, a story of mystery in which the agents never spring to life, you have but a wooden show. There must, however, be a story. You must provide a vehicle of some sort. (p.122)

There should be no episodes in a novel.

Every sentence, every word, through all those pages, should tend to the telling of the story. Such episodes

distract the attention of the reader, and always do so disagreeably ... (p.213)

He may not paint different pictures on the same canvass, which he will do if he allows himself to wander away to matters outside his own story; by studying proportion in his work, he may teach himself to tell his story that it shall naturally fall into the required length. Though his story should be all one, yet it may have many parts. Though the plot itself may require but few characters, it may be so enlarged as to find its full development in many. There may be subsidiary plots, which shall all tend to the elucidation of the main story, and which will take their places as part of one and the same work, -as there may be many figures on a canvas which shall not to the spectator seem to form themselves into separate pictures.

The unconscious critical acumen of a reader is both just and severe. When a long dialogue on extraneous matter reaches his mind, he at once feels that he is being cheated into taking something which he did not bargain to accept when he took up that novel. He does not at the moment require politics or philosophy, but he wants his story. (p.214)

Trollope stresses the need for a story with the qualities of unity, proportion and compactness in the novel, and Henry James emphasizes the same requirements:

Character, in any sense we can get at it, is action, and action is plot, and any plot which hangs together, even if it pretend to interest us only in the fashion of a Chinese puzzle, plays upon our emotion, our suspense, by means of personal references. We care for people only in proportion as we know what people are. In a perfect novel interesting characters are displayed in a coherent and well-shaped action, and probably they have grown together in the author's mind. But very often a situation or a character has been what the novelist started from; he has had to look for characters, or he has had to look for a story. Perhaps he is not quite satisfied with his final union of story and people, and the questioner has put a finger on a sore place. (Liddell, p.72)

Conrad often starts with a situation and a character, and we shall now try and find out what use he made of the story in his fiction.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF METHOD IN CONRAD'S FIRST STAGE OF AUTHORSHIP.

#### The Malayan Novels and Stories.

##### 1. Almayer's Folly.

The writing of Almayer's Folly took Conrad five years with long intervals. On several occasions the manuscript nearly was lost, as he started to write it merely for a pastime, when the memory of an occasional meeting with the man Almayer haunted him.

As works of art, Conrad's early novels may be inferior to his later work. Their significance for the critic lies in the spontaneity of their creation, in the fact that writing them without regard to the demands of the public and without knowledge of the exigencies of his craft, Conrad reveals the initial stage of the subjects interesting and the methods congenial to him. Therefore they are helpful for the elucidation of the whole of his work, -his pieces of apprenticeship-, which however, already betray the hand of the master. They contain in germ all the elements of his later work, -of method, structure and vision-.

We must recall that we are considering the structure of Conrad's novels from the point of view of the story. Our first step is the statement of the argument of the book we are considering, and the question: What happens in the way of action? Is the action as it stands clear to the reader?

It seems that from the beginning of his writing life, Conrad had doubts regarding this aspect of his novels. Jean-Aubry relates:

It was during this voyage (when Conrad met Galsworthy) that Conrad first communicated to anyone his literary projects. From 1889 onward he had always carried about with him the unfinished manuscript of Almayer's Folly, but he had allowed no one to read it.

There was a young Cambridge man called W.H. Jacques, on board the 'Torrens', and Conrad gave the manuscript to him to read ...

'Now let me ask you one more thing: is the story as it stands quite clear to you?'

He raised his dark, gentle eyes to my face and seemed surprised. 'Yes! perfectly.'

(Aubry I, p. 150)

What is the argument of the book then? The ultimate failure of a white man who is stranded in the wilderness. His last hope is some vague information about gold in the interior. In order to get it he confides in a young Malay chief who promises help. After a short while, the latter his efforts to help having failed, he elopes with the white man's daughter, ruining ~~the latter's~~ every hope, depriving him of his last hold on life and leaving him in utter desolation, with death facing him.

The book deals with the last disastrous stage of that failure. It takes two nights and a day. The first half of the book stretches over a few hours at nightfall. What happens during those few hours? Almost nothing! Almayer paces up and down the verandah of his decaying little bungalow, brooding interminably over his past, which led up to the miserable present. At great length, Conrad unravels his consciousness, trying to build him up from inside. One after another, his wife, his daughter, and

Babalatchi make a furtive appearance. Without any warning and justification, the view-point then shifts at random, in time and space, and we get their story from the author, whilst we leave Almayer alone, pacing up and down, absorbed in his thoughts.

The book starts with a situation, and this situation does not change at all in the first half. It keeps still and unmoving until all the threads leading up to it are laboriously wound up from the past.

There is action on two levels: on the immediate level, -the present-, and at second remove, -in the past-. The furtive appearance of the characters seems but an excuse for 'bringing them in', for throwing light on Almayer's life in order to correct the latter's view of it and <sup>to</sup> show it in its true aspect.

Ford Madox Ford, then Ford Madox Hueffer, Conrad's collaborator in Romance and The Inheritors, was well acquainted with Conrad's weaknesses and perplexities. He states on this aspect of Conrad's craft:

He was never convinced that he had convinced his readers, this accounting for the great lengths of some of his books. He never introduced a character, however subsidiary, without providing that character with ancestry and hereditary characteristics, or at least with home surroundings - always supposing that character had influence on the inevitability of the story.

This method, unless it is carefully handled, is apt to have the grave defect of holding a story back very considerably.

Every time when a new character appears, a clumsy machinery is set moving to explain him from the past. Before he is however really fixed in our mind and before we have been shown what he is like in the present, and have thereby gained a sense of his reality and enough interest

to take this lengthy proceeding into the bargain, he walks out and lets another in.

All this tears the narrative apart to such an extent that it needs a constant effort to distinguish between the past and the present. The action on the immediate level, -the present-, consists mainly of glimpses of the walking Almayer and is practically non-existent as such, whereas the action in the past consists of shreds of memories of ever different characters, seemingly chosen at random. As a result we have no fixed point for our consciousness of time or place. The action on the second remove, -however incoherent-, gradually supplants our knowledge of the fact that Almayer is still pacing his verandah, until inadvertently, he reappears in our view. These parts of the narrative, -'episodes' in Trollope's terminology-, stand in gross disproportion to the main story, if we can talk of a story at all. They are blended with lengthy descriptive passages for the sake of the setting of the stage for the present, and for the evocation of atmosphere. Almayer's inner monologue is often shown through images, through the peculiar way in which the details of his surroundings are seen, -an ominous dead tree floating down the river, lifting a broken branch like a warning hand, or Almayer falling endlessly through a bottomless abyss-.

Whenever, with a sense of relief, we come to the present in the course of the story and start to feel a foothold, we are thrown back and back again. The action is ever retarding and revolving in a backward circle without any obvious aim. It does not move, it is stagnant and does not fall into a quicker pace when we expect it to do so. Throughout this part of the book our attention is

constantly directed towards the past, although we know that some infamous disaster is awaiting Almayer in the future.

All Trollope's principles as to the good story are disregarded in this part of the book. The incoherent grouping of episodes and the extent and movement of time do neither make for unity of the story nor for its movement. They tear it up and check it. This incoherent compilation of episodes seems to aim at an exhaustive analysis of Almayer's past, and it also evokes an ever increasing oppressive feeling of paralysis in the face of an imminent disaster.

About the middle of the book, -after six chapters out of twelve-, the tortuous and laborious winding-up of the action from the past is completed, and the story starts to move. Almayer, in spite of his strenuous recollections, has still remained a phantom, a vague presence who can neither move our pity nor engage our sympathy. When the story begins to move, he is simply shoved aside and has to make room for minor characters.

Now the first real character is brought in: Babalatchi, a hideous and evil intriguer, statesman and advisor to the Radjah Lakamba. The author, in his sarcastic and slighting comments on the savage statesman, comes in for the first time. Babalatchi, like his master Lakamba, is shown from outside. He is made vividly real by his looks and behaviour, and characterised by particular gestures and suggestive remarks.

Conrad's disregard of dramatic action, -so evident throughout the first half of the book-, is shown to the



full at a crucial point near the climax of the story, when Nina leaves her father Almayer during the night (p. 151). On the point of leaving, she turns to have a last look at her father. Her mother checks her fiercely and after a short struggle pushes her back to the waiting canoe. We learn nothing about the struggle between the two women, but get a thorough rendering of all the shades of emotion the conflict evokes in the girl. Conrad cannot resist putting in some passing glimpses of her past which explain the conflict of emotions in her to the full.

As in the first half of the book, which provides an exposition of character and circumstance, the disproportion of action to the other aspects, -to description, evocation of atmosphere and analysis of character-, is in the second half reflected in the length of time it takes. The relation of the events at nightfall and of the following night takes six chapters. Those of the following day, when the story moves towards its climax, four chapters, the climax and final disaster two. To the very end of the book, Almayer has but been a pale phantom, Conrad's efforts to build him up from inside having failed, in comparison with his manner of delineating Babalatchi or Lakamba, who are, from first touch, amazingly real and betray the pen of the master to be. Almayer suddenly springs to life: we see what he looks like, see him act, hear him speak, and get a sense of his reality. The sudden courage he demonstrates however, by daring to face a savage with a revolver in his hand, seems rather inexplicable in comparison with his previous inertia of mind, paralysis of will, impotence of action, hysterical outbreaks of temper and weakness towards his wife and the natives, who cheat him

constantly and outrage his dignity.

The last few pages, full of bitterness and acrid sarcasm, show the pitiful end of Almayer.

In A Personal Record Conrad recollects that on reviewing Almayer's Folly, after he had written eight chapters, (p. 17) 'in the prolonged silence it occurred to him that there was a good deal of introspective writing in the story as far as it went ... was it intelligible in its action he asked himself, as if already the story-teller were being born into the body of a seaman'. Apart from elaborate analysis of character, there are many lengthy passages of description, far beyond that necessary to create a setting for the action. They are a main cause for the lack of movement in the book. Robert Liddell states concerning this aspect:

Fiction is the delineation of character in action, and the landscape in the background is merely incidental:

It is when he begins to take his eye off his characters that the novelist is most apt, in idleness, to focus it upon their background; it is easy and restful for him.

(A Treatise on the Novel, p. 111, p. 120)

The predominance of description of background detail is best seen in the fact that it creates the general mood of the story more strongly than the action itself. It is endowed with human emotions and in that quality becomes an onlooker and agent in the book. In later stories and novels, the wilderness or the sea are clearly seen as powers hostile to the characters. In 'Heart of Darkness' or The Nigger of the Narcissus they take an active part most clearly. They are not seen as they present themselves to the eye of the average mortal, but through

Conrad's vision they are endowed with powers of action of a distinctly moral character.

Another element which contributed to diluting the story was Conrad's confessed lengthiness of verbal expression. In his craving for precision in rendering sensations Conrad frequently lapsed into a compilation of epithets and a rhetoric variation of phrases, almost to the extent of effacing the impression he wanted to convey.

We can conclude by stating that the story in Almayer's Folly stands in complete abeyance before the other aspects of the novel: -description, evocation of atmosphere, analysis of character-, and is further weakened by a constant lengthiness of verbal expression. In the first half of the book the story is literally torn to rags, it is but a welter of incidents without a clear outline of action and distinct sequence of time. The action wears thin throughout the book and does not 'carry' consistently.

Conrad's treatment of Almayer and his attitude towards the minor characters shows that his ambition was not merely the rendering of Almayer's inner substance. The same criticism which Conrad made about Hilary in Galsworthy's Shadows applies to Almayer and to all the heroes of Conrad's early books up to Jim:

It all can be reduced to saying that for me Hilary is not a sufficiently big and human figure to stand in the forefront of the great question, the enormous interrogation point which for me symbolizes the book. You have robbed him not only of his flesh, (by a careful analysis) but also of his bones. With all the space he occupies, he is conceived, or carried out, in a minor key throughout.

(Aubry, II, p. 80, to J. Galsworthy, 1908)

Another criticism from the same time proves that Conrad had by then learnt his lesson. It refers to the same book and can equally be applied to Almayer's Folly:

As it is, the background is connected with the action, not by the development of action itself, but more or less by analysis. That, I think, is a defect.

What is the 'interrogation-point' in Almayer's Folly then? The characters, being what they are, do not engage our full interest, move all our pity, or compel our admiration. The attitude of the author seems to indicate that he is interested in something beyond them, which he tries to convey through them.

In spite of the lack of unity and compactness in its structure, the novel however shows another kind of unity, - an atmosphere of sinister gloom, an unbroken mood of doom and failure, which binds the badly ordered parts of the narrative together. A heavy symbolic machinery is created through the characters, and the descriptions of nature and universe. It acts more strongly upon the imagination than the agents in the book. It leaves us with a feeling of having viewed life in a strangely twisted way.

A few years later, after he had written the Outcast, Conrad started to write a third novel with a Malayan setting, but for almost twenty years was unable to finish it. After long years of desperate struggling he had to lay it aside. In the preface to that book, (p. VIII) which he finished towards the end of his life, he tries to explain the perplexities which compelled him to abandon it:

The contents and the course of the story I had clearly in my mind. But as to the way of presenting the facts, and perhaps in a certain measure as to the nature of the facts themselves, I had many doubts. I mean the telling, representative facts, helpful to carry on the idea, and, at the same time, of such a nature as not to demand an elaborate creation of the atmosphere to the detriment of the action. I did not see how I could avoid becoming wearisome in the presentation of detail

and in the pursuit of clearness.

We may conclude from this, that Conrad wanted to convey an idea, -or rather that he was from the outset concerned with an idea, the nature of which was not quite clear to himself. We can also infer that he had learnt his lesson from the defects of the preceding novels, but even so considered facts important only in as far as they helped to illustrate an 'idea'.

The comparison of the original with a revised manuscript of Almayer's Folly by John D. Gordan shows, that after many years Conrad was still intent on compressing the story. In 1916 he had revised the original manuscript for a new edition. Gordan states that several hundred words were cut out of the text, that Conrad usually excised entire sentences, sometimes bits of description and sometimes of analysis, and concludes that on the whole:

-- he was intent, even after twenty years, on quickening the pace of the story.

(p. 117)

According to his examination, chapters 6, 7 and 8, where the story gradually comes into flow, abound in modifications. Chapters 10 and 11, where Almayer comes to life, are most heavily corrected. He comes to the final conclusion that:

-- the change in the manuscript condensed the material although there were many additions intended to increase the vividness of impression.

(p. 118)

Wiley's judgment generally confirms our view on Almayer's Folly:



A rank overgrowth of tropical vegetation tends to smother the plot, it is true; and contrasted with the limited scope of action, the novel is packed with character, incident, and background detail, all contributing to a confused impression on first reading. (pp. 34-35)

Conrad's extraordinary talent was however immediately recognised, and his first novel warmly welcomed by the press.

For the execution I have no word to say. It is very feeble and all strokes fall beside the mark. But if I knew that - if I knew the causes of my weakness I would destroy them and then produce nothing but colossal masterpieces.

(Letters from Conrad, Sept. 24, 93, pp. 34-35)

Nevertheless, the book shows remarkable improvements in technique, method and structure. It has the same subject as Almayer's Folly and, with the exception of the central character, Wilcox, the same characters. It leads to the decisive phase of Almayer's undoing, previous to the catastrophe which is the subject of the earlier book.

The argument is again the failure of the white man stranded in the wilderness, - outcast of his kind, through his own dishonesty, - who grows his disgust by an act of blackest treachery against his trusting partner, Sigurd.

The book is divided into five parts, aiming in its outer form at the construction of a drama, in the development of climax and anti-climax. The action of the first two parts which stretches over several months, takes approximately the first half of the book. In this half, most of the deficiencies of Almayer's Folly are overcome.

The events are chronologically arranged, beginning

## 2. An Outcast of the Islands

Joseph Conrad replied to Edward Garnett's criticism of the last scenes of the Outcast:

Nothing now can unmake my mistake. I shall try, -but I shall try without faith, because all my work is produced unconsciously (so to speak) and I cannot meddle to any purpose with what is within myself. I am sure you understand what I mean. It isn't in me to improve what has got itself written.

For the execution I have no word to say. It is very feeble and all strokes fall beside the mark. Why? If I knew that - if I knew the causes of my weakness I would destroy them and then produce nothing but colossal masterpieces.

(Letters from Conrad, Sept. 24, 95, pp. 15-16)

Nevertheless, the book shows remarkable improvements in technique, method and structure. It has the same setting as Almayer's Folly and, with the exception of the central character, Willems, the same characters. It deals with the decisive phase of Almayer's undoing, previous to the catastrophe which is the subject of the earlier book.

The argument is again the failure of the white man stranded in the wilderness, -outcast of his kind, through his own dishonesty-, who crowns his disgrace by an act of blackest treachery against his trusting patron Lingard.

The book is divided into five parts, aiming in its outer form at the construction of a drama, in the development of climax and anti-climax. The action of the first two parts which stretches over several months, takes approximately the first half of the book. In this half, most of the deficiencies of Almayer's Folly are overcome.

The events are chronologically arranged, beginning

with the fatal side-step of Willems. In the first chapter Willems is brought in. He is not however merely built up by an interminable flow of inner monologue, but is first shown from outside, made real through his behaviour, particular gestures, and his manner of speech. Nevertheless we share Willems thought. As in the delineation of Babalatchi however and the rendering of his consciousness, Conrad has abandoned his attitude of complete detachment. Interwoven in the description of Willems and the analysis of his mind, there is constant ironic comment, direct and indirect.

In the following chapters, the other characters are brought in one by one, but not clumsily and incoherently. Inadvertently, they make their appearance, without checking the steady flow of action. The time-clock is working undisturbed. They appear, and are briefly sketched. When vividly seen from outside, they are endowed with an inner life, in as far as they are significant for the story. There are some virtually mute natives, -Lakamba, Ali and others-, but on the other hand Babalatchi, 'the puller of wires'-, is again elaborately described, and the stealthy functioning of his cunning and savage mind rendered meticulously.

The grouping of these, now strictly relevant parts of the narrative, -Trollope's episodes-, is so arranged as to carry the story on, not now in a backward circle, but forward, in a straight line of action. The extent of the episodes does not stand in disproportion to their significance for the story.

Till the end of chapter three, almost till the middle of the book, the action is moving steadily onward. Our interest in the development of events is persistently sustained and all the characters are brought in. Willems has succumbed to Babalatchi's wiles and to his passion for Aissa. He is ready to commit the black treachery which is to form the climax of the book and its moral pivot. But here, Conrad most disappointingly relapses into the manner of Almayer's Folly. Just as he omitted the crucial and decisive meeting of Willems and Aissa before, and but lengthily rendered the former's surrender of will to his passion, -preceding their meeting-, so he now skips the climax and, through the memory of Almayer, unrolls the action in retrospect. Conrad's seems to shrink from the rendering of the violent outburst and final stage of action, which crowns the development of events.

The second half of the book stretches over a day, a night, and two days. Conrad no longer shows how things happened, but tries to find out why they happened. Again Almayer paces his verandah, but now he is talking aloud and not merely conversing with himself. Lingard, just returned from an unfortunate expedition, listens to Almayer. He is stunned by the news of Willems' betrayal and, trying to catch a hint of an explanation in that lengthy report, listens to Almayer, occasionally interrupting him. As in the previous book the action of the past, -on the second remove-, predominates over that of the present. Although the manner of telling the story in retrospect has a detrimental effect on the structure of the book, it does nevertheless show a remarkable improvement in comparison

with the preceding novel. In this improved form, Conrad used it throughout his work, and with great success. His technique was characterised by his friend, Joseph de Smet:

L'écrivain abuse parfois de l'ordre rompu: il aime à commencer son récit à la fin, quitte à reprendre ensuite ce qui doit précéder et souvent sans observer un ordre bien défini. Il aime à introduire à cet effet des narrations très développées; le narrateur qu'il substitue à lui-même rapporte parfois ce que lui a dit un autre narrateur et le procédé ne s'arrête pas toujours là. J'ai noté dans Lord Jim, ce livre du reste absolument merveilleux, l'exemple curieux d'une transposition de ce genre au cinquième degré: un certain moment l'auteur dit que le capitaine Marlow raconte qu'un certain Egström lui a écrit qu'un capitaine de navire lui a relaté que Jim lui avait dit que ...

Almayer relates Ali's observations, so that we have part of the action on the third remove. No doubt the narrative gains in depth by this proceeding, but Joseph de Smet also formulates its weakness:

Il va de soi qu'un tel système n'est pas sans inconvénients, qu'il peut rendre la suite des idées difficile à saisir, surtout lorsqu'il s'accompagne de développements qui, à la première lecture, paraissent parfois d'une longueur extrême.

(Mercure de France, Tome XCVII, Mai-Juin 1912, Paris 1912, p. 59)

Conrad assuredly did not, without reason, relapse into his old, -from the point of view of structure faulty-, manner. As a result of Almayer's narration, Lingard is dumbfounded by Willems' conduct. His bewilderment constantly increases, until finally we find him groping for an explanation of Willems' motives, for revealing spark of light in the darkness of that betrayal -. Conrad has sacrificed the relating of straightforward action to a vain attempt: the elucidation of a something which proves to be an



'inexplicable mystery'. Lingard's vital energy is sapped by his failure to find an explanation for this abominable outrage of loyalty and trust. For days, the energetic old adventurer is unable to do anything. He then faces Babalatchi in a lengthy night-scene, still groping for a hint in the latter's version of the fatal events. The action stands back completely before this groping concern. Lingard, from the dark night of Babalatchi's hut, walks through a gloomy glowing sunrise to meet the ominous old hag, to face the mute and savage Aissa and finally, amidst a tremendous uproar of thunder and lightning, to threaten Willems. The scene is pregnant with imminent disaster, and thus increases the oppressiveness of this futile yet desperate search for an elusive truth. We know more than Lingard and Willems, -through Conrad's comment-, omniscience remains above us however, and we are not made to look through the mysterious logic of human destiny.

After Lingard's curse and departure, (like a vengeful God) across the river (of eternity), Willems' doom is confirmed and sealed by a deluge-like rainfall.

Apart from a few blows which seem to hit nothing and nobody, there is no essential action for about 130 pages. Their climax is not one of action but the culmination of the hero's moral development, or rather the nadir of his deterioration. His punishment is nothing concrete, but rather of a spiritual order. He is left alone with his guilt. It is almost exasperating for the reader to witness these people facing each other in silence and completely and utterly failing to understand each other when they

speak. There is an almost endless suspension instead of swift, dramatic action. Although Lingard finally names the mystery which he gropes to perceive, yet he cannot solve it. A name is not an explanation.

It may be of interest to compare Carol Reed's film-version of the Outcast with the book. The first part is rendered as it stands. Willems' meetings with Aissa are extended and stressed (as a concession to the public?), the moral squalor mitigated, but at the same time the allegoric implications falsified, by the fact that Almayer's and Willems' wives are white. The first climax of action, Willems' taking Abdullah's ship up-river, which is completely omitted in the book, is shown at length and makes its action more balanced. The second half of the book, being unsuitable material for a film because of its apparent lack of action is reduced to a negligible rest of the final meeting between Lingard, Aissa and Willems, apart from the direct rendering of Almayer's report in dramatic action. Even so, on visual presentation, the action wears thin. The gloom of Conrad's vision even in that version turned out so strongly, that on leaving the show an average spectator remarked it was not a film but something sickly.

In the Outcast, as compared with Almayer's Folly, the arrangement and proportion of the parts of the narrative has improved. This is partly due to more skilful handling of the characters, who, when the occasion requires it, are brought in smoothly, so that the story flows steadily all the time. Character-drawing from outside by minute observation has remarkably improved, and in the first half, predominates over the inner monologue. They are first shown from outside, and only then rendered from inside. In the rendering of their consciousness, the author comes in. His ironic comment is indirectly implied by his use of attributes, and often enough it is directly stated. The ironic strand in the book is thus strongly

stressed and further so by the grouping of the parts of the narrative, i.e. the peculiar light which the characters throw on each other by frequent shifts of time and view-point. This permanently ironic treatment in comment and grouping, only fades out and gives room to a sense of awe and fear, when the characters try to fathom the 'mysterious' depths of their motives which lead to disaster, that is where they exhibit Conrad's concern or obsession, or where he indulges in it.

The whole 'grouping and lighting' seems to aim at a revelation of the motives which led Willems into his guilt. We see his behaviour through Aissa's, Alm's, Ali's, and through Babalatchi's eyes, who has safe knowledge of all the self-destructive elements in the soul of the white man, - his greed for money and woman, and his readiness to succumb to their temptation at the expense of all moral bonds, to the point of 'casting off the trammels of heaven and earth'. Lingard's blind ignorance of this fact is opposed to Babalatchi's Conradese wisdom. This search for motives reaches its crucial point, when the dramatic action should reach its climax. The story is dropped, and the psychological interest prevails. An elaborate setting and atmosphere are provided, so as to bring out the revelation to the full. Yet nothing comes of it. In the crucial part of the book the action is completely submitted to analysis and to the evocation of a heavily charged symbolic atmosphere. -to the evocation of a landscape of the soul for this searching of hearts-. The author volubly hovers around his victim, -the man he has doomed to death for the sake of his truth-, ever ready to get

hold of the horrible secret that may come to light, but in vain. We watch the frantic efforts of the doomed man to evade his destruction, like a spider watches the death-convulsions of the victim in its web. Later, when Conrad had gained distance from his matter, this attitude was to be replaced by an all-embracing pity for the victims of life.

Conrad relates in a letter that the reviewers find the Outcast 'too long, too much description' etc. (Aubry I, p. 187, to Mrs. Sanderson, April 6, 1896). Garnett confirms our general impression of the book:

The plot had already taken shape in his mind, but most of the action was still in a state of flux.  
..he was too engrossed in wrestling with his characters to see precisely the effect of all the parts in relation to the whole.

(Letters from Conrad, pp. XII, XIII.)

In a letter to Conrad he speaks of 'a sense of boredom' and the 'oppression of the stillness and the heat', the 'monotony of life' which Conrad has strongly evoked in the Outcast. (Letters from Conrad, p. XXIII.)

We have already referred to Conrad's lengthiness of verbal expression. On publication of the Outcast H.G. Wells wrote a review, (The Saturday Review, vol. 81, London, May 16, 1896) castigating this flaw in Conrad's art. Some passages are worth quoting as they sum up the shortcomings of Conrad's style:

... a remarkably fine romance indeed. One fault it has and a glaring fault ...Mr. Conrad is wordy; his story is not so much told as seen intermittently through a haze of sentences. His style is like river-

mist; for a space things are seen clearly, and then comes a grey bank of printed matter, page on page, creeping round the reader, swallowing him up. You stumble, you protest, you blunder on, for the drama you saw so cursorily has hold of you; you cannot escape until you have seen it out. You read fast, you run and jump, only to bring yourself to the knees in such mud as will presently be quoted.

( He refers to chapter III, part V, p. 327.) (In the final version which we quote here some words are changed already probably in consequence of Wells' criticism.)

On Lingard's departure solitude and silence closed round Willems; the cruel solitude (orig. silence) of one abandoned by man; the reproachful silence which surrounds an outcast rejected by his kind, the silence unbroken by the slightest whisper of hope; an immense and impenetrable silence that swallows up without echo the murmur of regret and the cry of revolt.

Wells quotes another passage where one single image shines through a haze of words, -Willems wandering round aimlessly through the mud of the river-side, and his foot-prints gradually filling with water, reflecting the light of heaven-. He calls this a 'finely expressed symbol, lost in this dust heap of irrelevant words'. He comments that one has 'to feel about' for 'grasping the tangible facts' in this accumulation of words and 'qualifying clauses'. He speaks of a 'trampling army corps of dependant clauses' and continues:

For ten pages altogether does Mr. Conrad toil away multiplying words...

It never seems to occur to Mr. Conrad to put forth his effect and leave it there stark and beautiful, he must needs set it and explain it, and refer to it, and thumb and maul it to extinction.

His sentences are not unities, they are multitudinous tandems, and he has still to learn the great half of his



art, the art of leaving things unwritten.

He imagines his scenes and their sequence like a master, he knows his individualities to their hearts - and he writes despicably. He writes so as to mask and dishonour the greatness that is in him.

According to Ford's testimony and to Conrad's statements it was his overbearing anxiety to find 'the right word', -his craving for precision of verbal expression-, which caused this lengthiness and verbosity and rhetorical ring. It is the same craving which makes him endow even minor characters with stories of their own to make them convincing and the course of the story unavoidable. Passages like the one quoted are frequent throughout his early work.

He stood on the bank listening to the voice of the invisible river that flowed at his feet; listening to the soft whispers, to the deep murmurs, to the sudden gurgles and the short hisses of the swift current running along the bank through the hot darkness...

(Outcast, p. 214)

The air was still and inexpressibly oppressive...

(Outcast, p. 225)

Over the great forest, over all the innumerable people of unstirring trees - over all that living people immense, motionless and mute - the silence, that had rushed in on the track of the passing tumult, remained suspended as deep and complete as if it had never been disturbed from the beginning of remote ages.

(Outcast, p. 272) see Mégroz 109

The response of the critics to the Outcast was one of approval on the whole, and, in spite of his harsh criticism, H.G. Wells drew the attention of the cultivated public to the new writer. He wrote to Conrad himself:

You have all it needs to become a splendid novelist, except the skill, but you can get that by practice.

(Aubry, I, p. 211)

After the Outcast was published, Conrad stood on the crossways: should he go on writing or return to the sea? In the first spell of his elation about the good notices his novel had received, he wrote to Charles Zagorski, a friend:

A few days ago I was offered the command of a sailing ship... I refused. Only literature remains to me as a means of existence. You understand, my dear friend, that if I have undertaken this thing, it is with the firm resolution to make a name, and I have no doubt that I shall be successful in this connection. The question is only to earn the money 'qui est une chose tout-à-fait à part du mérite littéraire', yet I am not sure of it - but my needs are very moderate and I can wait. I therefore look towards the future rather calmly.

(Aubry, I, p. 185, 10.3.1896)

Conrad is aware of <sup>the</sup> discrepancy between the interest of the trained critic and that <sup>of the</sup> common reader, and aimed always at satisfying the latter's demands.

Although he revokes his decision a few weeks later (Letter to Vernon Weston, May 26, 1896, Aubry, I, p. 191) the die is cast: he goes on writing and sets about to acquire the secrets of his craft. Aubry relates from this time:

Il se plonge dans des lectures, et c'est dans des livres français qu'il étudie la technique du roman.

(Aubry I, p. 197)

A l'état d'innocence artistique où il avait tracé la première phrase d'Almayer avait succédé une inquiétude, une préoccupation de systèmes dont il avait discuté tout l'hiver avec Edward Garnett (1895), et qui ne l'avaient conduit, dans Un Paria des Isles qu'à un excès de littérature, à une surcharge de descriptions et d'épithètes qui masquait, par endroits, l'intérêt humain du récit.

(Aubry I, p. 212)

'Intérêt humain' is a vague term, and it seems that lack of a consistent method rather than too much method, was the cause of the deficiencies of Conrad's art. He found it very difficult to consciously acquire a method, and wrote to his aunt in Brussels, Mme. Poradowska:

Je viens d'étudier 'Pierre et Jean', pensée, méthode et tout, avec le plus profond désespoir. Cela n'a l'air de rien, mais c'est réellement un mécanisme si compliqué qu'on s'en arracherait les cheveux. J'ai envie de crier de rage en lisant.

(Aubry, I, p. 197)

Les idées ne viennent pas. Je ne suis ni un personnage ni les événements.

(Aubry I, p.197)

At the beginning of 1896 Conrad started to write his third novel with a Malayan setting. For the first time he tried to write a book which was not in the main based on personal reminiscence. He was unable to complete the book. The reasons for his failure are revealed in the letters of distress which he wrote to his friends:

Here I have used up 107 pages of manuscript to relate the events of twelve hours. I have done it in pursuance of a plan. But is the plan utterly wrong? Is the writing utterly lost? - I don't know, conveying anything but the picture of my own folly.

(Letters, late June, 96., p.36)

### 3. The Rescue

From now on, Conrad, forced to make his living by his pen, 'had to tell stories', even if he 'had no story to tell'.

For the writing of Almayer's Folly and of the Outcast, Conrad had exploited a short contact, - a fleeting glimpse of a person and a situation-. In order to develop a full story from that short contact he had to provide facts. He used data of hearsay as well as observations and impressions stored in his memory (see Gordon), but he was also compelled to invent facts. He had sufficient time to do this for Almayer's Folly. Notwithstanding, the action wears thin in that novel, and never moves far away from the scene of the initial impression around which the novel was to crystallise. He had less time to invent the events and details for the Outcast, and whilst writing it, his great difficulty of invention forecast its shadows. At that time he wrote to Mme. Poradowska :

Les idées ne viennent pas. Je ne vois ni les personnages ni les événements.

(Aubry I, p.197)

At the beginning of 1896 Conrad started to write his third novel with a Malayan setting. For the first time he tried to write a book which was not in the main based on personal reminiscence. He was unable to complete the book. The reasons for his failure are revealed in the letters of distress which he wrote to his friends :

Here I have used up 103 pages of manuscript to relate the events of twelve hours. I have done it in pursuance of a plan. But is the plan utterly wrong? Is the writing utter bosh? - I doubt having conveying anything but the picture of my own folly.

(Letters, 10th June, 96., p.36)



To be able to think and unable to express is a fine torture. I am undergoing it. It's very ridiculous and very awful. Now I've got all my people together I don't know what to do with them. The progressive episodes of the story will not emerge from the chaos of my sensations. I feel nothing clearly. And I am frightened when I remember that I have to drag it all out of myself

Other writers have some starting-point ... I don't. I have had some impressions some sensations in my time; - impressions and sensations of common things. And it's all faded.

I begin to fear that I have not enough imagination - not enough power to make anything out of the situation; that I cannot invent an illuminating episode that would set in a clear light the persons and feelings. I am in desperation and I have practically given up the book.

I am paralysed by doubt and have just sense enough to feel the agony but am powerless to invent a way out of it. This is sober truth. I had bad moments with the Outcast but never anything so ghastly, nothing half so hopeless.

(Letters, 19th June, 96)

The more I go, the less confidence in myself I feel. There are days when I suspect myself of inability to put a sentence together : and other days when I am positively unable to invent anything that could be put into a sentence. Gone are, alas! those fine days of Almayer's Folly when I wrote with the serene audacity of an unsophisticated fool.

(Aubry I, p.196, to E.L.Sanderson, Nov. 21, 96)

Conrad had by now arrived at what he was later to call 'the first crisis of his writing life'. (Preface to the Rescue)

What emerges plainly from these passages, is the fact that Conrad was, without taking recourse to his personal reminiscence, unable to provide the incidents and details necessary for his story.

The Rescue was finished, after intermittent efforts, in 1919, 23 years after it was begun. In its preface, Conrad throws light on his dilemma by statements which,



at that distance, seem to hit the mark better than the complaints in his letters of the time :

... no doubt, the first of them (reasons for failure) was the sense of general difficulty in the handling of the subject ... as to the way of presenting the facts, and perhaps in a certain measure as to the nature of the facts themselves, I had many doubts.

(Letters, p.186)

This seems to indicate that Conrad doubted not only the adequacy of his methods, but also the intellectual ground he stood upon, -the truth of the 'idea' which ultimately determines the manner of presentation-. This is confirmed in the following :

'I mean the telling, representative facts, helpful to carry on the idea, and at the same time, of such a nature as not to demand an elaborate creation of atmosphere to the detriment of action. I did not see how I could avoid becoming wearisome in the presentation of detail and in the pursuit of clearness.

What I had lost for the moment was the sense of the proper formula of expression, the only formula that would suit.'

(Letters, p.186)

Some other passages from contemporary letters may serve to throw more light on his dilemma with The Rescue :

I feel horribly the oppression of my individuality. I feel like a man who can't move, in a dream. To move is vital - it's salvation - and I can't! I feel what you mean and I am utterly powerless to imagine anything else. It's like being bewitched, it's like being in a cataleptic trance. You hear people weeping over you, making ready to bury you - and you can't give a sign of life!

(Letters, 12th March, 97)

I want to make it a kind of glorified book for boys - you know, no analysis. No damned nothing. Pictures. Pictures. Pictures.

(Letters, 8th Oct., 97)

My story is there in a fluid - in an evading shape. I can't get hold of it. It is all there - to bursting, yet I can't get hold of it no more than you can grasp a handful of water.

(Letters, 29th March, 98)

It's like a curse. I can't imagine anything.

(Letters, Sat., May 98)

In the matter of the Rescue I have lost all sense of form and I can't see images. But what to write I know. I have the action only the hand is paralysed when it comes to giving expression to that action.

(Letters, Tuesday, May 98)

Pages accumulate and the story stands still. I feel suicidal.

(Letters, Aug. 3, 98)

All these cries of distress seem to be symptoms of a temperamental inertia, which, as soon as it came to giving expression to swift-moving, dramatic action, paralysed Conrad's power of imagination and invention. That he was essentially contemplative he himself realised admitting that it was 'his fate to be descriptive and descriptive alone'. But that would not do for a novel. There must be action and a story with progressive episodes. Conrad later referred to the first draft of The Rescue as 'something lightly inflated and verbose' (To Galsworthy, 27th Aug., 1910, Aubry II, p.114).

The passages quoted, as well as a comment on Stephen Crane which dates from this time, show plainly that Conrad was fully aware of his shortcomings. Concerning Crane he wrote to Garnett :

Why is he not immensely popular? With his strength, with his rapidity of action, with that amazing faculty of vision - why is he not. He has outline, he has colour, he has movement, with that he ought to go very far.

(Letters 5th Dec., 1897)

Conrad's theory of creating human beings mainly from inside by rendering their sensations, -to the neglect of the story-, did not hold. The inner monologue, as a means of revealing and building up characters, the endeavour to make the reader see the workings of characters' minds through images, and to reflect the state of their souls in the aspect of the surrounding matter, demands such extensive creation of details that the story is paralysed. Deprived of its tremendous visual machinery, the material of act and speech in Conrad's books is poor. Act und speech however are the dramatic matter 'par excellence'. It is not as a sequence of moving scenes, but rather as a group of moving pictures, that one tends to remember Conrad's books. His concern lies rather with the elucidation of the mental and psychic states, -in studies of character-, than with dramatic effects. The most evident instance of this concern is his habit of skipping the dramatic climaxes of his novels, -as if on purpose-, and of substituting elaborate reports in retrospect. He prefers to look at dramatic action from the distance, and to handle it at leisure. The reader of course feels cheated. Whenever his interest is aroused to its highest pitch, in expectation of decisive action, it is frustrated. As emerges from Conrad's letters, the main criticism of his work had so far been : lengthiness, verbosity, too much analysis and description for the sake of creating atmosphere, heaviness of style by abundant use of epithets, too little action, and lack of movement. His power of vision had however been praised. This amounts to stating that the structure of his novels was not adequate to his vision. His habit of hovering around the essentially static figure of his hero, and viewing him incoherently through many eyes in an effort to register his every shade of thought and feeling, and perhaps seize his mystery, had proved inadequate in his

first two novels, and proved disastrous now. Although , as we have seen, Conrad had by now realized the importance of the story for both the structure of his books and for their popularity, he could never bring himself to writing novels from the point of view of mere entertainment.

The concern and obsession of the artist constantly defeated the craftsman. On several occasions, he even found himself unable to resume the story of his novels. Till the end of his life, it remained his cherished ambition to write a book which was concise in expression and brief and simple in structure. He admitted to Garnett that it was 'his secret desire to achieve a feat of artistic brevity, at least once before he died. (Letters, 4th Dec., 1923)

#### 4. Tales of Unrest.

Even when Conrad had attained a high degree of perfection in his craft, he still complained that he could only write 'when the spirit moved him', and that he 'had no control whatever over the spirit'. We have the testimony of his wife, of friends, and of his letters, that he did not work according to a preconceived plan. He started from a situation or a character, and mostly wrote towards a generally fatal end, shaping the story in the course of writing. 'I am writing towards some fixed event or scene I can see, but I do not know how I shall ever get there', he tells a friend (Mégroz, p.41). This habit also may, apart from his vision, account for the fact that Conrad's novels lack clarity of outline, and seem inconclusive in action as well as meaning. Even though however a story may only take shape in the course of its writing, it will come to the end which the author deems adequate to its course and congenial to his intentions. If he has to offer a conclusion we shall get it, whether it comes to us straightforwardly or by devious ways. Conrad does not offer conclusions readily, and the inconclusiveness of structure and vision in his novels may well lead us to suspect an inner perplexity in the face of life as well as in matters of his fiction.

Edward Garnett informs us that Conrad 'worked by intuition after preliminary meditation' though 'he was, of course, always interested in literary technique and good craftsmanship, such as Flaubert's or Maupassant's' (Garnett, Letters fr. Conrad, pp. XXIX - XXX). We have similar statements from Conrad himself. Nevertheless, the passages quoted above, -along with others from Conrad', seem to



confirm that he consciously tried to acquire the technical skill of his craft, which, as he felt himself, he desperately lacked. Because of the indifference of the public Conrad took many years to become sure of the value of his fiction. In the meantime he was often tempted to make all sorts of concessions to the taste of the ordinary reader. Garnett tells us about Conrad's search of method:

I remember Conrad one day when he was very depressed at his lack of popular success throwing down some miserable novel by Guy Boothby which he vowed he would imitate, saying: 'I can't get the secret of this fellow's manner. It's beyond me, how he does it!'

(Letters fr. Conrad, p.XXX)

In his desperate struggle with the Rescue it was vital for Conrad to 'find the right formula of expression', and for that purpose he had to meet several requirements:

1) He had to look for subject-matter which would yield the material of narration more readily.

2) He had to stress the groundwork of action more strongly and to base plot, analysis, description and evocation of atmosphere on a story strong enough to carry them consistently. He had to dramatize the minds of his characters by revealing them rather through act, gesture and speech than through an interminable flow of inner monologue, visualized through a heavy machinery of symbols and metaphors. He had to observe strict economy of verbal expression. The extent of the episodes had to correspond to their significance and relevance for the main story. Their arrangement and grouping had to carry the story on and not to check it.

Although Conrad was devoted to the ideal of detachment on the part of the author, he could not help coming to the fore in the first two novels, by direct or indirect comment. He had however remained more or less in the void, - a vague presence with an undefined view-point-. The effect of this method, according to P.S. Lubbock, is 'that the novel leans against a wall which isn't there'. He holds further, that if

'... we are bound to rely upon an intervening story-teller in some guise or other, it is much more satisfactory to know who the story-teller is and to see him as part of the story, than to be deflected away from the book by the author, an arbitrary, unmeasurable, unappraisable factor.'

(The Craft of Fiction, p.128, p. 139)

Conrad's views on this aspect of his craft as set forth by Ford Madox Ford approximately meet those of Lubbock:

The one thing you cannot do is to propagandise, as author, for any cause. You must not, as author, utter any views; above all you must not fake any events ...

If, however, your yearning to amend the human race is so great that you cannot possibly keep your fingers out of the watch-springs there is a device that you can adapt ...

You must then invent, justify and set going a character in your novel who can convincingly express your views ...

(Joseph Conrad, pp. 208-209)

3) In order to bring in his own views which he felt it incumbent on him to convey to the reader without immolating his ideal of aloofness, Conrad had to come in openly, or, if he did not want to do so, had to refer his stories to a pair of eyes and to another mind. He had to provide a definite angle of vision which would give the story a hold from inside and outside.

Whilst struggling to continue the Rescue, Conrad tried at intervals to find relief and clarity in the writing of stories, and in doing this found salvation from his perplexities. This was intentional rather than spontaneous. He wrote short-stories, the nature of which demanded an effort at brevity, simplicity of outline and conciseness of language. A new subject-matter was used and an attempt made at different methods.

The writing of these stories freed him from his paralysis of imagination and expression. He wrote most of them swiftly, -in one rush of the pen so to speak-, as opposed to the inertia which paralysed him as soon as he sat down to his novel. The progress which he made is best shown by the fact that these stories lend themselves to a definition in terms of action, whereas his novels never do. They were for Conrad a 'new adventure of writing for print' (Preface to 'Tales'), a new departure in his art.

## The Idiots.

This story was written on visual suggestion, in connection with facts of hearsay. It contains a new subject-matter with all the typical elements of Conrad's vision. Its action answered Conrad's interest, and was a suitable vessel for conveying his 'idea'.

Conrad frankly claims the story as his, and before he, -or the invisible onlooker-, proceeds to render the tale, he tells us how he met the idiots, who are to be the characters of the story, in reality. He relates that he heard parts of the story from people, and that others confirmed and complemented the story, till it stood at last before him, 'a tale formidable and simple'. The emphasis on the simple story is most obvious in the fact that its hero is a taciturn and simple peasant. His quality of mind makes elaborate analysis impossible, and compels the author to show him from outside. The minds of the idiots were literally simple, and equally offered no opportunity for the evocation of sensibilities. There is no character in that story with a subtle and discriminating mind. In comparison with preceding novels there is virtually no analysis. The sequence of events is chronological and there is next to no shift of time or viewpoint. The course of the action is simple and clear. Nevertheless Conrad's idea turns out to the full by the nature of the events as well as by the atmosphere of pervading gloom in the surrounding nature. Its evocation however, is not so much stressed as to slow the story down unduly or cause the interest of the reader to flag. Conrad had, for the first time, succeeded in writing a simple and compact story.

Some passages from the 'Idiots', compared with the passage quoted from the Outcast, may serve to illustrate the consistent development of Conrad's prose. They are packed-full of visual detail, and, at the same time superb in their power of evoking Conrad's peculiar atmosphere of gloom and darkness. They are pregnant with a sense of imminent disaster.

And from morning till night one could see all over the land black denuded boughs, the boughs gnarled and twisted, as if contorted with pain, swaying sadly between the wet clouds and the soaked earth.

The clear and gentle streams of summer-days rushed discoloured and raging at the stones that barred the way to the sea, with the fury of madness bent upon suicide. From horizon to horizon the great road to the sands lay between the hills in a dull glitter of empty curves, resembling an unnavigable river of mud.

He looked at the black earth, at the earth mute and promising, at the mysterious earth doing its work of life in death-like stillness under the veiled sorrow of the sky.

(p.70)

He looked at the enlaced skeletons of the trees. As he swung his legs over the stile a cawing flock of birds settled slowly on the field; dropped down behind his back, noiseless and fluttering, like flakes of soot.

The sea-winds coming ashore ... fresh from the fierce turmoil of the waves, howled violently at the unmoved heaps of black boulders holding up steadily short armed, high crosses against the tremendous rush of the invisible. On starry nights .. the bay .. resembled an immense black pit, from which ascended mutterings and ~~slighs~~ sighs as if the sands down there had been alive and complaining.

The darkness came from the hills, flowed over the coast, put out the red fires of sunset, and went on to seaward, pursuing the returning tide. The wind dropped with the sun, leaving a maddened sea and a devastated sky. The heavens above the house seemed to be draped in black rags, held up there and here by pins of fire.

(p. 171)



Conrad has twice in this passage indulged in his habit of repeating nouns with varying attributes, for the sake of rendering thoroughly and exhaustively what they are meant to express. The result is that little remains of them. Darkness, stillness, silence, immobility, death, the earth and such like things, he repeatedly tries to qualify. On his second attempt, they become something like mute, or dumb, and on the third repetition, often enough mysterious, impenetrable, immutable etc. He has not yet learnt 'the great art of leaving things unwritten'. This manner of bringing attributes to bear on a central conception from different angles, so as to bring out its 'true' meaning as fully as possible (which according to Wells's definition makes his phrases multitudinous tandems and not unities), this habit reflects Conrad's manner of throwing light upon a central character from different angles in order to drag out his 'truth'. As he dilutes the intensity of expression in the first instance, so he breaks up the unity of structure of his books in the latter. Style and method are the expression of one temperament and so also is vision.

Apart from this weakness, the passage quoted shows assurance and mastery of touch. Such expressions as 'the veiled sorrow of the sky' or 'the enlaced skeletons of the trees' show that he can seize the preponderant aspect of the matter recorded and leave the rest unwritten. The intensity and strength of the impression created by this passage, is mainly due to the fact that in Conrad's rendering, the dead matter surrounding life is made alive too, assuming human qualities, feeling and even acting. Nature and universe respond to the struggle and strife in human life, and reflect and influence it.



Even if they are unconcerned, their very unconcern gains the aspect of a cruel pose, in the face of human suffering. The world of each individual is for Conrad his peculiar 'set of consciousness'. His rendering of it must then of necessity reflect his peculiar mode of thought and feeling. As far as nature comes to life in Conrad's books it assumes the peculiar aspect of his temperament - gloomy, melancholy, dark, sad, bitter, bewildered.

Heaven here has the veiled aspect of sorrow, rain falls like tears on an earth which seems but a gloomy graveyard and is swept by cold winds, -the rush of the invisible-. The black boulders hold up crosses, symbols of suffering and death, and the darkness puts out the fire of sunset. This setting is elemental in shape and colour : -earth, sky, water, and the winds of heaven; rocks, mud, the bare skeletons of life, and the black omens of death. Even heaven is draped in rags, and there is nothing but sorrow and tears, mutterings and sighs. Apart from the deficiency explained above, this passage shows economical rendering of detail and intensity and strength of atmosphere.

## An Outpost of Progress.

Edward Garnett followed Conrad's first stage of authorship attentively, offering encouragement and advice, praise and criticism. Before sending his manuscripts to the publishers Conrad at this stage used to submit them to Garnett for inspection and correction, considering the latter as the absolute authority in matters of his craft. After he had finished the 'Outpost' Conrad wrote to him :

I wrote the Outpost of Progress with pleasure if with difficulty. I wrote the Outpost of Progress thinking of you.  
(L.fr.C., p.44, Aug.5.,96)

Conrad certainly thought he had done well with his story, following Garnett's advice in the method of writing. He continues :

I made there an effort at conciseness - as far as in me lies - and just managed it short of 10,000 words.

You see the belief is not in me - and without the belief - nothing good can be done.

A few days later he replied to Garnett's criticism of the story :

You are right in your criticism of Outpost. The construction is bad. It is bad because it was a matter of conscious decision ... But when I want to write - when I do consciously try to write or try to construct then my ignorance has full play.

(L.fr.C., Aug.14., pp.45-46)

Conrad may have written with pleasure as he had happened upon a subject closely connected with his most important experience - his acquaintance with ivory and slave-trading in Africa. He considered it as the revelation of the very truth of existence. The story

was 'true enough in its essentials'. (A.N., pp.VI-VII) It therefore delivered him from the necessity of invention and gave him such relief that he 'stepped into a very different atmosphere' with a 'different moral attitude' and he 'for a moment fancied himself a new man'.

The 'Outpost' is a forerunner of 'H.o.D.' and was written with the ambition of conveying 'the truth' (A.N.VII), the all-important revelation which the crucial experience of his life brought him. Conrad tells his story as an impartial observer. Being concerned however with his very truth he must of necessity come in and explain. True enough, the 'meaning' of the story is mainly conveyed through the events, but Conrad does not shirk from offering his views frankly outside of the story itself. The strong irony of his direct and indirect comment reminds us constantly of his presence. His attempt at conciseness in structure is thus to a certain extent spoilt.

At the very beginning of the story Conrad gave himself away. There is a long explanatory passage anticipating what should have been shown and established through its impact as a whole. Garnett pointed this out to him, as Conrad's reply proves :

The first three pages kill all interest. And I wrote them of set purpose. I thought I was achieving artistic simplicity. (L.fr.C., Aug.14.,96.,pp.45-46)

This remark again shows where Conrad's ambition lay, and that he consciously searched for the right method. He certainly was concise in his comment in the 'Outpost', but in fiction the story is a matter to be shown, not something that is explained to the reader.

The whole story essentially serves to describe a static situation extending over several months. The little dramatic action that there is does not concern the central characters directly. They are merely passive onlookers, -they do not actively shape the course of events but suffer and endure what happens to them by force of the situation -. They are - concerning their activity as well as their moral value and attitude - rather negative than positive heroes. It is evident that Conrad is not so much concerned with what those people do, but with showing how they are exposed to what happens around them, and how their substance disintegrates under the pressure of their surroundings. They perish in a sordid manner. The story is paradigmatic for the 'truth' of Conrad's first phase of writing.

The characters in this story are shown from outside. There is little analysis and description only in as far as it provides the necessary setting and illustrative facts for the symbolic and allegoric structure of the book.

## The Lagoon.

The necessity to make a living by his pen as well as the need to acquire the secrets of his craft urged Conrad to write short-stories. He was still struggling with the Rescue when he wrote to Garnett :

In desperation I took up another short-story. I must do something to live and meantime perhaps a ray of inspiration may come and light me along this labyrinth of incertitude where I am lost.

The one I am writing now I hammer out of myself with difficulty but without pleasure. It is called The Lagoon and is very much Malay indeed.

(L.fr.C., Aug.5th 96, p.44)

A Malay tells a story to a white man who is spending the night at his hut. It's a tricky thing with the usual forests river stars wind sunrise, and so on, - and lots of second hand Conradese in it.

(L.Aug.14th 1896, p.47)

I am right glad to know you like the 'Lagoon'. To be quite confidential I must tell you it is, of my short-stories, the one I like the best myself.

(Aubry I, p.202, to Miss Watson, March 14th, 1897)

This however was merely because Conrad at this time had not yet written any more - furthermore it is a good example of the many shades of flattery which Conrad had on his palette at all times.

The story is a new venture in method and a very happy attempt at that. Conrad puts the responsibility for the story away from himself (which probably is what he called tricky). It has a look of distance and of objectivity. The observer is brought into an advantageous position, -he is not involved and there is a zone of safety so to speak between him and the scene. Everything



is seen entirely from the outside, there is no analysis of character at all. The whole story is provided with a setting, -a framework-, a short episode in a white man's life. This method of telling the story on the second remove provides a double safeguard for securing its simplicity and conciseness. A simple Malay, merely able to render bare facts, tells the story to a white man who is virtually mute and but vaguely described. The white man fulfils a double function. On the one hand he provides a definite point of view, which knits the story together along with the outer framework. On the other hand he is a passive though attentive listener who provides a control for the intelligibility of the story. The 'Lagoon' has a rare quality of perfection in its finish, outstanding among the inconclusive ends of most of Conrad's narratives. The final stage of the tragedy related in the story inside the story is unfolded before our eyes, at the point where the episode in which it is embedded comes to its close.

There are long passages of description in the 'Lagoon', evoking a sumptuous atmosphere. Those conveying impressions of immobility and stillness as opposed to the turmoil within the tale, are splendid. Conrad could however, still write the same bosh which he had managed to fabricate in the Outcast, as the following instance may prove :

... the darkness, mysterious and invincible, the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests..

(p.189)

The white man gazed straight before him into the darkness with wide-open eyes. The fear and fascination, the inspiration and the wonder of death, of death near, unavoidable, and unseen, soothed the unrest of his

race and stirred the most indistinct, the most intimate of his thoughts. In ever-ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out into the stillness round him, into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appear untrustworthy and infamous, the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence. In that fleeting and powerful disturbance of his being the earth unfolded in the starlight peace became a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battle-field of phantoms terrible and charming, august and ignoble, struggling ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts. An unquiet and mysterious country of inextinguishable desires and fears.

(p.193)

We shall not consider here that the word 'our' means a severe slip of method; -an unjustifiable shift from narrator to author- it shows however that Conrad's heart went out in this passage. Here he tries his hand at an analysis of thought and, as we shall see later, expounds a central aspect of his outlook. The visual content of this lengthy passage is virtually nil. One can neither feel nor imagine anything of what should be evoked in us. It is truly all 'phantom', but neither 'terrible' nor 'charming'. It is merely 'grey mist', as Wells called it. In this passage nouns are sometimes repeated with a variation of accompanying epithets (darkness, suspicion, stillness). Sometimes they are used in twin-forms with a variation or contract of meaning, conveying a sense of elusiveness and ambiguity. There is a compilation of epithets. They too are mostly used in twin-forms with varied or antithetic meaning and sometimes nouns are qualified by four attributes. No feeling or sensation is straightforward. All are mixed, -ambiguous and confusing. The sentences are long and clumsy with many clauses which convey a feeling of vagueness and inconclusiveness. This impression along with the general heaviness of phrasing is increased by

the nature of the epithets. Almost all of them are of Latin origin and have several syllables. They are long and ponderous. Their lengthiness is further increased by frequent negative prefixes. Their meaning proper is denied by these and turned into its opposite. This helps to enhance the general confusion of feeling which pervades the passage. The meaning of vague words thus twisted, the mind cannot follow quickly enough to maintain normal reading pace. Even on repeated reading it is impossible to grasp their impact clearly.

(un-, in-, im-, ig-, invincible, impenetrable, unavoidable, unseen, unrest, indistinct, intimate, untrustworthy and infamous, impenetrable, unjustifiable, inhuman, ignoble, helpless, inextinguishable) Many words are so vague in their proper, not negated meaning, that they fail to convey a distinct feeling or sensation, words like the repeated mysterious, fascination, inspiration, suspicion, disturbance etc. Pretentious and indistinctly suggestive words like mysterious, impenetrable, inscrutable etc. recur constantly, and keep doing so when Conrad has already achieved excellence in his craft. Used by a beginner, they would seem to betray mere incapacity of precise expression. In Conrad's prose however, with his genuine power of imaginative expression, they seem to be symptoms of bewilderment and perplexity in the face of certain aspects of human existence. Their compilation in passages through which Conrad tries to convey a piece of his 'truth' is certainly not accidental. The frequency of negative prefixes is indicative of the nature of this truth. Being essentially negative and opposed to current values, it cannot be rendered in positive terms.

Latin words, when properly used, endow language with

a robe of solemnity and dignity. But here their ring is hollow like a bombastic pretence without much substance.

This passage, because of its very deficiency, reveals another characteristic of Conrad's style and manner of presentation to the full. As we said, the attributes employed do not present us with things in their true shape and colour. They mostly are denominations of human feelings and sensations. The objects put before us are not shown such as they are, but the feelings and sensations they evoke in the human observer are anticipated. The thing which is the stimulus of human sensation is itself endowed with the sensation it evokes. This proceeding contains both a great advantage and a great danger.

1. Conrad endows all the characters, nature and universe with his own emotions and admits himself that he renders the world 'through the medium of his own emotions' .. (Aubry II, to Sir Sidney Colvin, March 18, 1917, p.184) Thereby it comes to life and reflects in its every aspect and detail the observer's feelings and sensations. The author himself ultimately comes forth in every part of the universe he creates. The forest, the river, the storms and calms of this universe, the sea, the ships, the sky and its winds, all feel and act and take part in the drama passing before our eyes. The coordination of feeling and sensation in one range and from one human angle makes such vision powerful but narrow. In fact, its narrowness is the very condition of its power.

2. The author's angle of vision and his evaluation of every aspect of existence is imposed, and by its narrowness, most strongly imposed upon the reader. He has no chance of getting a glimpse of life, of man and of the matter surrounding his life such as it is. The world is seen through a pair of spectacles, through a glass-pane which changes its colour, aspect and form. True enough, we are made to see things more



intensely and more clearly. Anybody however, not in accord with Conrad's temperament, notions and views, is bound to find the effect of the glass-pane distorting and discolouring, falsifying the aspect of reality. Of course the reader should bring a great amount of willingness for understanding to the reading of a book, but there are limits to this willingness. In Conrad's absolutely subjective view of life which, by its very objectivity of rendering can be felt as compulsion, there is something essentially intolerant. We cannot have our own emotions or form our own judgment as to the nature of the things in Conrad's world; they are handed to us, enveloped in moods and feelings, and imposed on us in that peculiar emotional colour and form. We get life and the world ready-made so to speak. The sensations which they could evoke are already provided and we have to do nothing but accept them. Everything is seen through the narrow lense of a camera and only the things interesting to Conrad's one-track-mind are brought into focus. Everything else simply does not exist.

In the passage quoted above we have seen Conrad at his worst. We must remember the fact however that Conrad did not write in his mother tongue, and allow for it. In times of difficult production and lack of confidence he must have found the handling of his language of choice rather difficult. We must also take into account that Conrad had learnt the French language long before English and knew it perfectly. To judge from Conrad's letters he seems to have been obsessed by a real mania for verbal precision at the beginning of his writing-life, and makes the sincerity of an author in this respect the charge proof of his value. Ford Madox Ford reports on Conrad's habit of looking first, at times, for the French rendering of an impression and of then looking for the English equivalent. This would explain his preference of Latin words.



The very deficiency of the passage quoted reveals that aspect of Conrad's temperament which is the cause of his incapacity to render compact swift action. It also accounts for the lack of a definite and clear vision in his books. Its ultimate effect roughly corresponds to the impression of inconclusiveness, of vagueness and confusion of values, which is characteristic of the whole of his early and of much of his later work. This may be due to the lack of a clear and defined vision, but it may also, on the other hand, be intended to convey an essential element of his view of existence. Whatever it is, such passages must be but lumps of dead matter, slowing down and checking the course and movement of the story. Their effect on the structure of the whole book is necessarily detrimental.

Regarding the whole body of his work Conrad held that (A's N., p.5) "the 'Lagoon' marks, in a manner of speaking, the end of his first phase, the Malayan phase with its special subject and its verbal suggestions".

5. The Nigger of the Narcissus

In comparison with the difficulty he had experienced in writing his novels, Conrad had written all those stories in a short time and with great ease. The next story he ventured upon was to carry him a good step forward in his craft. It begun as a short-story, and, as often happened later, when almost finished, caught hold of his imagination and ended as a novel. Invariably, when Conrad came to grips with a story and decided to let it grow into a novel he dropped all good intentions as to attaining perfection in his craft, and relapsed into his old congenial manner of showing the story in retrospect. He splits it up into episodes, he 'lets himself go', -and often introduces an observer and commentator, and starts to parade view-points in order to throw light on every facet of the central character. He moves a lense around the latter so to speak and brings him into focus at different times, distances, and angles. The result is the interruption of the course and time-sequence of the story, the retarding and checking of its movement for the sake of bringing its 'truth' to light.

Shortly after he had started to write the Nigger Conrad wrote to Garnett :

I crawl on with it. It will be about 30 000 words. I must enshrine my old chums in a decent edifice. Seriously do you think it would be too long? There are so many touches necessary for such a picture.

(Nov.1, 96, p.55)

From the very beginning he was anxious to avoid being 'lengthy', but in the course of writing all his difficulties seemed to vanish.

1. He had chosen a subject-matter he was intimately familiar with, -an episode from his life at sea. There was no necessity of inventing a story.
2. After the story had grown to some length he deliberately employed the manner congenial to him, i.e. he disregarded the conventional formal requirements of story-telling for the sake of depicting a series of characters known to him. He wrote to Garnett : 'I am letting myself go with the Nigger. He grows and grows. I do not think it's wholly bad though' (letters, Nov. 1, 1896, p.55)
3. He had started the story as an outside observer and in its course changed incongruently to the autobiographical method, -to I and We-, so that he could comment freely, and render incident after incident and event after event, without following a fixed plan.

In a letter to Garnett Conrad calls the tale his 'beloved Nigger' and deliberately drops all regards of popularity :

Of course nothing can alter the course of the Nigger. Let it be unpopularity; it must be. But it seems to me that the thing -precious as it is to me- is trivial enough to have some charm for the man in the street. As to lack of incident well - it's life. The incomplete joy, the incomplete sorrow, the incomplete rascality or heroism - the incomplete suffering. Events crowd and push and nothing happens. You know what I mean. The opportunities do not last long enough. Unless in boys' books of adventure. Mine were never finished. They fizzled out before I had a chance to do more than another man would.

This is the first obvious statement proving that Conrad's mistrust of action in life was the direct cause of its neglect in his fiction. This was rooted in his temperament and experience and was not merely a matter of not being able to write.

On finishing the book Conrad was jubilant :

And the end! I can't eat - I dream nightmares - and I scare my wife. I wish it was over! But I think it will do! - Mind you I only think - not sure. But if I didn't think so I would jump overboard.

(Letters from Conrad, 10th Jan., 1897, p.67)

In another letter he remarks that he is 'very conceited about that thing'. At the same time he was at a dead end with the Rescue :

.. writing nothing; often retaining tears; never curses. At times thinking the world has come to an end - at others convinced that it has not yet come out of chaos.

(Letters fr. Conrad, 11th June, 1897, p.84)

The writing of the Nigger had taken only ten weeks. The book was to prove to Conrad that he could write and achieve a masterpiece in the manner congenial to him. Garnett comments on this fact :

And had Conrad failed to 'bring off' The Nigger, or had the novel missed fire, in the reviewers eyes, as many a masterpiece has done, nothing more disheartening for Conrad and ominous for his future could be imagined.

(Letters fr. Conrad, pXXVII)

The Nigger got eulogistic notices from most critics, but some did not fail to point out its lack of structure. (Aubry, I, p.219) This however could not shake Conrad's belief in its artistic value. He wrote to Miss Watson :

The story just finished is called The Nigger : A Tale of Ships and Men. Candidly, I think it has certain qualities of art that make it a thing apart. I tried to get through the veil of details at the essence of life. But it is a rough story, - dealing with rough men and an immense background ...

(Aubry I, 27th Jan., 1897, p.200)

He wrote to Garnett : 'Hang the filthy lucre. I would do any mortal thing for Jimmy -you know.'

(Letters fr. Conrad, 28th Aug., 97, p.88)

In the same terms he wrote to Cunninghame Graham :

I am very conceited about that thing and very much in love with it, and I want it to appear before you at its best.

(Aubry I, to Cunninghame Graham, 9th Aug., 97, p.209)

The attacks levelled against the Nigger are hinted at in Conrad's letters. He comments thus, on an allegation that his vision was so narrow :

There was no levity in my treatment of the cook (Podmore) - I did not try to, -and I trust I did not make him ridiculous. Nothing was further from my thoughts than irreverence. It would have been untrue to my convictions.

(Aubry I, to Miss Watson, 27th June, 97, p.205)

Obviously Cunninghame Graham had objected to the treatment of Podmore too, and Conrad replied;

C'est vecue, -et c'est bête. There are twenty years of my life, six months of scribbling in that book, -and not a shadow of a story. As the critic in to-day's D'ily Mail puts it tersely : 'The tale is no tale at all'. The man complains of lack of heroism.

(Aubry I, 9th Aug., 97, p.209)

At the very end of his life Conrad sums the book up :

In the Nigger I give the psychology of a group of men and render certain aspects of nature. But the problem that faces them is not a problem of the sea, it is merely a problem that has arisen on board a ship where the conditions of complete isolation from all land entanglements make it stand out with particular force and colouring. In other of my tales the principal point is the study of a particular man, or a particular event.

(Aubry II, to Henry S. Canby, 7th Apr., 1924, p.342)

Conrad in the splendid preface to the Nigger is able to formulate his artistic creed for the first time in admirable terms. As to the book itself he states that it is an attempt to present (not to analyse!) an unrestful episode in the obscure lives of a few individuals; 'who belong to the great mass of the 'bewildered simple and voiceless'. He calls them 'children', (p.9) which limits



the possibility of elaborate analysis for the author. Their thoughts, like their acts, are, with the exception of James Wait, the Nigger, simple and straightforward and not two separate things, as is often the case in Conrad's books. They are mainly shown from outside. All characters reveal themselves by their looks, their behaviour, by certain stereotype gestures, by little habits, by a characteristic manner of speaking, -essentially by their activity or passivity in the face of the situation. There is no inner monologue, Conrad has abandoned the analysis of thought and feeling almost completely. He comments on the characters, but we are not made aware of more than Conrad could know of them and what we can perceive from outside. It is interesting to note that for the first time, Conrad does not skip the climaxes of the tale but depicts them to the full. The first climax is <sup>a</sup>tremendous uproar of the elements, -the heroic struggle of the ship and its crew against the vicious fury of the gale -. The second one is the climax of the mutiny, culminating in Donkin's treacherous throwing of the belaying-pin. In both instances the men are however ~~e~~ssentially passive and static. At the crucial moment of the mutiny they stand in two groups, -officers and men-. Donkin's act and the short scuffle following it are the only movements. We cannot see them however, as this crucial scene, like most of the others in Conrad's books, takes place in the dark.

Although there is virtually no story in the book, there is nevertheless a strong unity in the whole of the narrative. First there is a unity of time and place. It deals with the successive stages of a voyage from Bombay to London, following upon each other in their

chronological sequence. Conrad's old habit of bringing in the individual characters one by one, each with his own particular story, is abandoned. They are introduced gradually and casually and their images built up by occasional touches of the author's brush. The setting is the confined space of the ship, a moving centre in the vast background of the sea and the sky. Like a drama, the whole tale is divided into five parts. It begins with an exposition, -the excellent description of the crew in the fore-castle-, followed by the splendid scene of its mustering and the masterly rendering of the hero's entrance from the dark. The successive stages of the struggle of the elements around the ship reflect and influence the struggle in the hearts of the men. Part III contains the first climax, the tremendous uproar of the storm at the Cape as a retribution for the deterioration of the crew, -their inner decay-. Then there is a retarding lull, followed by an anti-climax with the mutiny. Then the death of the hero occurs, and the book is rounded off in an afterlude, the paying-off of the crew.

The narrative gives ample scope for description of men and of nature. Conrad has learnt his lesson from the reproaches levelled against his verbosity. In some passages with their economy and precision of wording, he attains to an unparalleled command of the language of his choice. From the aspect of its visual rendering, Conrad has reached a persistent level of perfection in this tale. The description of the ship's departure from Bombay, and of its triumphant run through the channel are gems of English prose. The final allegoric eulogy of Britain has the fine ring of Shakespeare's famous passage.

The book is packed full of incident, character and description. It gains compactness by its inner development rather than by its outer structure, and the unity of time and place. The tale deals rather with the successive stages of the development of the collective psychology of a group of men than with their actual achievement. The matter-of-fact incidents and events which occur in the way of action on such a cruise, are recorded only in as far as they serve to the elucidation of the inner development. As with the other novels, and in contrast to the stories, it is impossible to render the gist of the book in terms of action. To state an argument at all is very difficult as the essential development is one of a moral nature, which on close consideration gains universal importance.

As had happened in the Outcast, Conrad, in the course of writing, had come to grips with the moral problem involved. The story is gradually smothered by the development of a haunting spiritual atmosphere. The man at the very core of the tale, -the black hero James Wait -, is a nucleus of deliberate paralysing inertia, a dodger who tempts the whole crew to betray their duty.

The officers of the ship, compelling the men to act and to perform their duty, are opposed to him. All action, all incidents, the fury and the calms of the sea and the struggle of the ship, all serve to carry on this moral strife. Although undoubtedly having a beauty of their own, they are essentially agents in the allegory displayed, and serve to the elucidation of the moral problem.

This moral concern, to which the action is entirely subordinated, gives a strong coherence and inner unity to the book. Every episode, every incident serves to its

illustration. In fact, the whole of the tale is hinged upon a mystery, -an enigmatic force which paralyzes the vitally important action of the crew -. The cause of the moral deterioration of the crew is the Nigger's sickness or his refusal to work and take his share in the struggle of the small community which, floating on an immensity of water, depends for its survival on the unswerving devotion to duty of each of its members. It is impossible to know whether he is a monstrous sham or whether he is really, as he pretends to be, mortally sick. In any case, he gradually corrupts the whole crew and brings it to the verge of disaster. The intention of the tale is clearly not to show the struggle of the crew on the surface-reality. That is merely the necessary outcome and consequence of the gradual disintegration of the characters. Rather is it to fathom the secret of James Wait, -the black phantom who is finally, -like 'Kurtz' in 'The Heart of Darkness' -, but a voice, and who even refuses to glide from the planks into his wet grave, dodger or innocent victim of evil suspicions to the last. All characters are related to James Wait and submitted to his corrupting influence. They resist it or succumb to it, offering their views of him according to their inner substance. Although the subject-matter is taken from Conrad's memory, it is of such nature as to allow him to give creative expression to his obsession with his 'truth'. As we have seen by now that is nothing else but the attempt to reveal the nature of evil. Such an undertaking must be futile. The end of the Nigger is thus inconclusive and moreover, the whole tale, as seen from this aspect, is bewildering. The characters are mere accessories and means for Conrad's craving to throw

light on the Nigger's black soul from ever different angles : he is the touchstone of their inner substance. Apart from this constant concern, the unity of the book is maintained, as we said already, by the unity of time and place, and by careful handling of the episodes as to extent and progression of the narrative.

In this tale there was fortunately no need for Conrad to analyse and render states of mind, because the conflict going on in the souls of the characters, -the struggle of will and instinct and the subsequent paralysis of action -, has assumed an allegoric shape. The different characters stand for the different forces and qualities of the human soul. The conception of the book allowed Conrad to show the strife of the soul and make it visible. This is remarkable progress in his art. The shape of the tale, as we have shown, was partly determined by his conviction that life does not flow like a clear story, and more by his haunting moral concern. This novel was for him a means of conveying his feeling of the cruelty and injustice of human life, -his haunting awareness of the evil underlying our existence. Its shape was deliberately adapted to this concern, according to the aim of its writing. The conventional story was the victim of this revolution of form, which ultimately resulted from the oppressive influence of a particular form of modern life on the author.

Before we conclude this chapter, we shall consider the peculiar development of method in the Nigger. We have shown that in this book Conrad made all the characters bear on the one in the centre, in order to reveal each of his features, and, if possible, to drag his inner 'truth', into the light of the day. His aim was not to



render action and to entertain the reader, -he is too deeply involved in his effort to find an explanation for some mystery-, he deliberately discards the thought of the reader and the coherent story in the course of writing. Several inconsistencies of method which he did not bother to smooth out prove that his obsession took hold of him, or at least that he was more concerned with showing some truth to the reader than with entertaining him. Conrad wrote with considerable speed and was still groping for the method which would enable him to write a good story and to give adequate expression to his 'idea' at the same time. Some of the incongruities of method are real slips and come very close to destroying the illusion of reality in the reader.

There is first of all a slip which occurred several times in the preceding stories. As an objective observer the author may perfectly well change his perspective. He may close up with the scene, or view it from the distance. This change should however be imperceptible, so as not to give the reader the feeling of being whirled about in space in order to accompany the author to the most advantageous angle of perspective. This happens in the 'Lagoon' (p.188), when he has identified his point of view with that of a white man in a boat. He suddenly moves away to have a look at the white man and the boat from the distance. We are left behind on the river when it has disappeared, and then again we close up with it, to our surprise, in a narrow forest-creek, and again it is the white man who views the scene.

The same occurs often enough in later books, e.g. when he leaves Jim alone on the bridge of the 'Patna' and views the ship from high above, so that we can see it speeding through space like a planet in the company of

other planets. He leaves Razumov alone at the bottom of a long flight of stairs, viewing him and the prince appearing above from the distance. In 'Karain' it certainly is a slip unnoticed by the author (p.15) when he gives a close-up of the prince and then moves far away into the distance to take a glimpse of the whole village, where he himself is supposed to be attending the prince. Then he returns in a breath. Whenever this happens, it is not merely to gain an advantageous position, but mainly to gain symbolic value from the scene, and a contribution for the 'idea' of the story.

The conflict between the freedom of perspective of the unconcerned onlooker outside the story, and the restricted view of the author as a character inside the story, between 'they' and 'them' and 'I' and 'we', runs through the whole of the Nigger. What exactly Conrad's part was in the reality of life, whether simple sailor or officer, is not clear. (He very probably was an officer). Towards the end of the book, the stress lies on the autobiographical method, and the story is perfectly credible when we witness how Jimmy is dug out of his cabin, after the rage of the gale has abated. We know the author to be present and witness the scene through his eyes. But it is almost too much for our credibility when we witness the night-scene between Jimmy and Donkin, where no mortal soul is supposed to have been present. In this night-scene Conrad makes a final attempt to seize upon Jimmy's 'truth'. For that sake he runs the risk of complete loss of credibility which, according to his own views, is mortal sin for a writer of fiction. Although that scene is excellently done its incongruity is a serious blemish on the book. Conrad was willing to commit a mortal sin against the sacred rules of his craft for the sake of his 'truth'.

The impression left on one's mind on reviewing the Nigger is that of a series of splendidly drawn pictures of men and scenery. They are essentially static pictures despite the turmoil and strife depicted in the book. It is a large canvas with many portraits. As far as there is movement in the book, it is mainly the rhythm of the whole, the flow and change of detail in the setting, with changing and varying lights thrown on the actors and the sea, -the light of sun, moon and stars as well as flashes of lightning, blinding glares in pitch-dark nights. The abiding impression is one of an abundant variety of contour, colour and sound, each, in its own particular way, conveying some dark intention. Conrad's vision has broadened tremendously. The stillness and oppression, the heat and the stifling closeness of tropical settings is gone. It has widened into the vast expanse of the sea, its shores invisible, with cool breezes and powerful winds, serene in the brilliance of sun-lit days, reverberating terribly like a huge bell from the furious blows of gales in abysmally dark nights. The ship is the centre of the wide unlimited circle of sky and water, borne on the wings of winds like a graceful white bird, or struggling desperately over terrifying dark depths, like a wounded animal. In comparison with the previous books there is a sense of nearly gained freedom, a sense of huge spaces, of power and of magnificence. Conrad seems to be a new man altogether and to have found a formula of expression particularly his own.

Karain.

When still writing the Nigger, Conrad started to write another short-story, 'The Return'. He finished the Nigger before it and then wrote 'Karain' in a few days time. In this story, he consistently employed the autobiographical method. This he had used but halfheartedly in the Nigger.

Like the 'Lagoon', 'Karain' is a story within a story. Its framework is an episode from Conrad's life. The author is a character in the framework and listens to the telling of the story proper, by its hero Karain. For the last time he has returned to the familiar Malayan setting, but now it is but seen from the sea. It has assumed a completely different aspect. In contrast to the familiar atmosphere of the little cabin on board the white man's ship, Karain and his story gain a real flavour of exotic strangeness. The story gains in depth and interest by the fact that in the person of the author we have the assurance of a determined view-point. Conrad himself states that the story later 'produced on him the effect of something seen through a pair of glasses from a rather advantageous position'. He 'had not gone back to the Archipelago' but only 'turned for another look, a distant view'. (Preface, A.N., p.VII)

After the story was finished, Conrad re-wrote it on Garnett's advice. His letters show that it was written in pursuit of a theory. There is a ring of ease and assurance in its phrases, but at the same time, there is some bad writing. The whole story is well planned and perfectly executed. The first page serves to evoke a reminiscent mood. The first chapter depicts the setting

which is called a 'stage' (p.7) for the main actor. He is brought in in the second chapter and elaborately described. Then he yields his substance in his own story told in retrospect (in part 4 and 5). When he appears, Karain walks in the 'haze of a mystery', and the rendering of his past through his own mouth is the simplest means of explaining his personality and of finding the awful secret, which, as we learn from the beginning, he is carrying round with him. His mind being simple and not sufficiently subtle for the complex mind and feeling of the white man, his tale must of necessity be simple and confined to bare facts and action. The setting of the story, its framework, is closely connected with it. As in the 'Lagoon', we have a finishing touch, rare in its perfection for Conrad's fiction. The end of the story peters out into the end of the episode which proves <sup>id-</sup>its framework.

'Karain' has the same motives as the 'Lagoon', -betrayal, regret, remorse-, but the idea at its back is very different. It is one of the few of Conrad's stories with a happy end, and this fact, along with the peculiar beginning of the story, would seem to indicate that in this tale the author was aiming at an approach to popular taste. At the beginning, the aim of the story is shown to be that of the adventure story of traditional pattern. 'We seem yet to hear their voices speaking of battles, travels and escapes', so the story-teller begins. White traders who have anchored their ship in an idyllic bay receive a native prince on board. He is not an incarnation of evil (as the natives used to be in the rest of his early fiction) but a 'noble savage'. Although intellectually inferior, he is humanly fine and so at least on the same level with the white man or even



superior to him, when compared with the corruption of European society.

Though in the beginning Karain only 'murmured non-chalantly of life and death', they soon become the main issues. From the beginning we know that Karain is a doomed man, and this knowledge deadens any trivial feeling of the reader. Karain's behaviour soon is nothing but an 'accomplished acting of pretences', and Conrad delves for the something hideous which is bound to be hidden in him, -that tainting cause which, in his view, lies in every human being-. After Karain's mystery is brought to the fore, it soon becomes the centre of interest. When he is opposed to European society, it is done by mere comment. Such speeches of the characters have a distinctly artificial ring, and their symbolic and allegoric implications are muddled and confused. Conrad's high-flowing praise of the national spirit rings false too, very much like a piece of intended flattery. In this story he has made an attempt at a compromise with public taste, but his effort did not come off very well.

Conrad never liked 'Karain', and even whilst writing confessed to Garnett : 'I feel horribly the oppression of my individuality' (Letters, p.79, 12th March, 97). Referring to the time when he wrote 'Karain' Conrad later stated : 'I perceived that in common with the rest of men, nothing could deliver me from my fatal consistency : We cannot escape from ourselves' (Author's Note, p.XII).

Conrad gives ample scope to description in 'Karain', and depicts splendid scenery. Although there is little atmospheric writing and little analysis, his haunting concern turns out again in his occasional display of eloquence and verbosity, -his fascination for failure and betrayal-, and the mystery of evil. Life is shown to be

illusion in essence, something completely incomprehensible,  
and society void of real values, consisting but of pretences

## The Return

Conrad was practically penniless when writing the 'Return', and the necessity to achieve popularity, -if only to enable him to make a living with his pen-, must have played an important part in his discussions with Garnett. Both were of the opinion that Conrad's subject-matter stood in the way of his popularity. In the 'Tales of Unrest' and in the Nigger, Conrad had started to exploit the riches of his memory, -his life at sea and his African adventure-. Both settings were rather extravagant for the insular taste, and Conrad's treatment did not help to make them more palatable for the average reader. The representation of society, of its values and interests, of its prejudices and conceits, was ever the favourite realm of the novel and made for its popularity. As Conrad states himself, the man in the street delights in finding himself in a novel, and he certainly, up to this point, could not find himself in Conrad's books. We may infer from a remark in a letter that Conrad chose the subject-matter of the 'Return' on Garnett's suggestion : 'The subject is yours as much as ever it has been' (Letters, p.92, 27th Sept., 97) For the Pole and sailor, with his particular and peculiar background and experience, English society must have been altogether unfamiliar. His radical rejection of many of its values and the fierce sardonic humour with which he treats it, could not carry him any further on the road to popularity. Regarding his inability to invent, and his limited range of experience, he must have found his new matter very difficult to handle, and accordingly he complains to Garnett :

I have a physical horror of that story. I simply won't look at it any more. It has embittered five months of my life. I hate it.

That story has been a heavy trial to me while I was writing it. It has made me ill! I hated it while I wrote.

(Letters, p.96, 27th Sept., 97; 8th Oct., 97, p.95)

On the other hand this subject-matter offered a rewarding material for his inclination to analyse states of mind. Conrad indulged in it to excess.

In form and subject-matter, this story is completely different from the preceding ones. Conrad employed a method opposite to the one used in the Nigger, as the whole of it is but one piece of lengthy analysis, almost without action and story. It can be compared with Henry James' The Sense of the Past, a book which virtually is a piece of reminiscence with bits of conversation between door and angle, rendered with a complete disregard of the sense of time and the sequence of events. Although Conrad's story is deficient in structure, the analysis of Hervey's mind, being essentially shown in images, is really a great achievement of its kind. There is however, in the sense of our definition, no story at all in the 'Return'. There is virtually no action, no sequence of events, but merely analysis of successive states of mind and soul.

A prosperous and self-righteous London citizen returns from town and finds a letter from his wife, informing him that she has gone off with another man. The effect of this blow on his mind, -sensations, emotions, thoughts-, is evoked and visualized at length through images, over many pages, whilst he is virtually doing nothing but standing around in a room. All his complacency and security as to the conventional values upon which he thought his existence safely founded, are utterly destroyed. His world crumbles to pieces, as is shown through images of explosion

and destruction. He is left with the shambles, with the sudden knowledge that the whole of existence is monstrously unsafe, that all the sacred values of his society have but a precarious hold at best on the minds of the human beings whom he thought to be its very pillars. Quite surprisingly his wife returns. What has happened cannot however be undone. There they sit and stand, grappling for an explanation of the mysterious impulse that urged her to her conduct. He holds forth to her in unctious tones about the superior value of all that their life contained, and which she was about to betray. But he himself has lost the belief, and all his preaching is a mere compilation of words, hopelessly at variance with what he really intends to say, yet cannot get hold of. It seems a desperate attempt to save the little that has remained of their past life, but it is a hopeless undertaking. They have dinner together and afterwards sit around. We are but vaguely aware however of what they really look like or do. The woman says virtually nothing. After the initial act which led to the situation, -presented and exploited at such length and with such intensity-, nothing that happens can be of any importance. Alvan's thoughts are bent upon the nature of that initial mystery, and revolve around it in a vain effort to grasp its 'truth'. The situation evoked stretches from the hours of nightfall till midnight, but we are only vaguely aware of the passing of time. Once Conrad has tumbled his characters into the moral pitfall dug out for this purpose, and has set their minds working upon the secret that made them walk into it, he forgets time and action, to try and get at its 'truth'. This is nothing other than an attempt to prove that they had to walk into it, because something in their very nature and some merciless force, exploiting the unsafe spot in them, made it, in an unguarded moment, inevitable



that they should fall. Life is full of such pitfalls, and men, according to their nature, and invariably fooled by some infernal outer influence or circumstance, are destined to walk into them. After the harm is done, they realise this sorry state of affairs for the first time in their lives, and are haunted by an agonising sense of guilt.

Conrad's concern in writing the 'Return' was not to entertain the reader. He had, even in the original conception of the story, set himself a different purpose, and adapted its incidents for it.

When the publishers Chapman & Hall wanted to print his story as a serial in a magazine, he refused to divide it because 'if so, the MORAL effect is lost.' He informs Garnett of this in a letter and writes :

You see I wanted to give out the gospel of the beastly bourgeois - and wasn't clever enough to do it in a more natural way. Hence the logic which resembles the logic of a melodrama... I went on creating the moments for the illustration of the idea. Am I right in that view? If so the story is bad art. It is built on the same falsehood as a melodrama.

(Letters, 11th Oct., 97, p.98)

There is not much speech in the 'Return', and almost all thinking and talking is done by Alvan. We said before, that his words are hopelessly at variance with the thoughts and motives underneath. This conveys a feeling of hopeless falsity and unreality on the surface of the life presented. It seems to imply that two beings, although having lived on most intimate terms for many years, are utterly isolated and alone at bottom, so that no man can ever perceive the truth of another man's heart. Conrad wrote to Garnett :

My dear fellow what I aimed at was just to produce the effect of cold water in every one of my man's speeches. I swear to you that was my intention. I wanted to produce the effect of insincerity, of artificiality. Yes! I wanted the reader to see him think and then to hear him speak - and shudder. The whole point of the joke is there. I wanted the truth to be first dimly seen through the fabulous untruth of that man's convictions - of his idea of life - and then to make its way out with a rush at the end. But if I have to explain that to you - to you! - then I've egregiously failed.

(Letters, 29th Sept., 97, p.93)

As seen from this intention, the narrative is certainly a masterpiece in its simultaneous presentation of a reality of thought and its falsity of surface expression. They are maintained persistently throughout the book, with the effect of arid sarcasm. In spite of all deprecating criticism as to structure, the narrative is admirably done. The visualisation of long trains of thought through the symbolic use of background detail is a masterly achievement in itself, although it is the very reason for the deficiency of structure in the book.

The complete neglect of the story for the sake of the elucidation of the motives, thoughts and feelings which have produced the situation, - that is analysis of all the characters concerned-, was the cause of the deficiency of structure of Conrad's early novels. It also contributed to the failure of the Rescue and is the fatal weakness of the 'Return'. Conrad intentionally wrote the narrative as it stands and was of course reproached by Garnett for not having shown the development through action, or through more action, -as Conrad's reply proves- :

I've tried with all my might to avoid just these trivialities of rage and distraction (Revelation of character through action and gesture - depiction from outside) which you judge necessary for the truth of the picture. I counted it a virtue, and lo and behold!

You say it is sin. Well! Never more! It is evident that my fate is to be descriptive and descriptive only. There are things I must leave alone.

(Letters, 29th Sept., 97, p.93)

This seems to indicate that he has made up his mind to drop the method of revealing characters from inside, by thorough and lengthy analysis and visualisation of thought and feeling to the disregard of the story and to the neglect of the structure. Now he intends to show his characters from outside alone. This means that they have to yield their substance through their looks and acts, so that the story must of necessity be stressed, and the general structure of his books strengthened.

As in most of Conrad's early stories and novels we have, on reading the 'Return', a sense of oppressive inertia and immobility. The more the slight action approaches its climax, the stronger this feeling grows. There is however no relief or outlet in swift action. The haunting sense of paralysis is never taken away from us. The whole narrative essentially renders a situation which is stagnant and immobile, -or rather a series of situations that revolve very slowly around one incident-. Swift redeeming action, -the solving and redeeming climax-, is ever shirked or by-passed, and viewed in retrospect from a safe distance. In one of the letters of distress written during the struggle with the Rescue, Conrad proves that this inertia resulted from his particular temperament and was increased by the disastrous conditions he had to cope with during the first half of his writing life, -the struggle with creeping disease, never-ending poverty, haunting doubts of his ability to write in the face of the permanent indifference of the public, and with his artistic perplexities-. All this certainly paralysed his

creative will and strengthened his native bent to reflection at the cost of action. It of course also caused his thoughts to ever revolve around the causes for his constant failure and miserable existence, and tinged his whole outlook on life. Conrad was not the man to forget himself and to transcend his personal griefs in an effort to represent something outside the pale of his most personal concerns.

The interminable flow of inner monologue through Hervey's mind, -the rendering of his 'stream of consciousness'- more than tempted Conrad to indulge in his bent to verbosity. Consequently there are a considerable number of passages which exhibit this fault. On the other hand, there are some excellently visual and symbolic suggestive renderings. Here is another of his attempts at a precise rendering of sensations, by a compilation of words, -denominations and application of ever changing epithets in ever new angles of definition-, in a long series of dependant clauses :

It penetrated, it stirred without informing; it was the very essence of anguish stripped of words that can be smiled at, argued away, shouted down, disdained. It was anguish naked and unashamed, the bare pain of existence let loose upon the world in the fleeting unreserve of a look that had in it an immensity of fatigue, the scornful sincerity, the black impudence of an extorted confession. Alvan Hervey was seized with wonder, as though he had seen something inconceivable: and some obscure part of his being was ready to exclaim with him : 'I would never have believed it!' but an instantaneous revulsion of wounded susceptibilities checked the unfinished thought. (p.141)

It seemed to him that something inexpressibly momentous was in progress within the room, that every word and every gesture had the importance of events preordained from the beginning of all things, and summing up in their finality the whole purpose of creation.

(pp.149-150)



He dwelt within the invincible wisdom of silence; he was protected by an indestructible faith that would last forever.

(p.156)

... as if time and himself, engaged in a measured contest, had been pacing together through the infernal delicacy of twilight towards a mysterious goal.

(p.174)

Impossible to know. The gross precision of that thought expressed to his practical mind something illimitable and infinitely profound, the all embracing subtlety of feeling, the eternal origin of his pain. This woman had accepted him, had abandoned him - had returned to him. And of all this he would never know the truth. Never. Not till death - not after - not on judgment day when all shall be disclosed, thoughts and deeds, rewards and punishments, but the secret of hearts alone shall return, forever unknown, to the Inscrutable Creator of good and evil, to the master of doubts and impulses.

(p.174)

Here again we have THE SECRET OF HEARTS .

Conrad was, at this stage in his writing, ever fascinated by the 'mysteriousness' of his own truth, and ever trying to grapple with it. Raising it to the dignity of a central concern in his books became a habit and an obsession with him. But neither he, nor we, for that matter, can ever know what the 'inscrutable', the 'infinitely profound' or the 'impenetrable' is. Conrad feels ever puzzled. We feel ever cheated. Nature and source of evil are beyond our scope.

On the other hand we have masterly written passages, e.g. the one where the maid ascends the steps with a candle in her hand, 'and on her track the flowing tide of a tenebrous sea fills the house' (p.182). This is more suggestive than the finest display of wordiness. At this stage in Conrad's work we can find some of the finest passages of description side by side with bosh. After the obvious failure of the 'Return', he did as he



intended. He stopped this flow of vaguely suggestive wordiness in favour of conveying what he intended to say through 'images and images alone', and not through explanatory reflection. It is now that Conrad reaches the climax of his artistic excellence, -where his fiction gains the value of genuine poetic expression through the medium of prose-. In some stories, the creation of imagery, -the expression of his 'truth' through truly artistic means-, is so excellent, that parts of them assume the significance of myths.

Incident and characters were literally taken from his own experience. With this story, he took the last, decisive step in the consistent series of attempts at method which he had made in the writing of the 'Tales of Heart'. For the first time, he introduces his medium of narration, -Captain Marlow, an old sea-dog who related his stories in the first person. From now on we have Conrad's 'Marlowian' phase; Marlow being used as narrator throughout several subsequent novels. Garnett states :

His method of narrative, in the first person, through the mouth of Marlow, was first employed in 'Youth' : it came natural to him, it saved trouble and in finding it answer both there and in 'Heart' of Darkness he elaborated it further in 'Lord Jim'. (Letters, p.111)

The statement that the use of Marlow came 'natural' to Conrad is something akin to the one about the 'instinctive' writing. Conrad had tried hard and for unavailing reasons to develop his methods. He had happened upon the autobiographical method first. It was however incompatible with his views on the craft of fiction as he states, a few years later, in a letter to Galsworthy :

As against your people you must preserve an attitude

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ROAD TO PERFECTION.

#### Marlow as Conrad's Medium of Narration.

Still struggling with the Rescue, Conrad wrote his next story, 'Youth', within a few days time. He did not need to invent anything for it, as incident and characters were literally taken from his own experience. With this story, he took the last, decisive step in the consistent series of attempts at method which he had made in the writing of the 'Tales of Unrest'. For the first time, he introduces his medium of narration, -Captain Marlow, an old sea-dog who relates his stories in the first person. From now on we have Conrad's 'Marlovian' phase, Marlow being used as narrator throughout several subsequent books. Garnett states :

His method of narrative, in the first person, through the mouth of Marlow, was first employed in 'Youth' : it came natural to him, it saved trouble and in finding it answer both there and in Heart of Darkness he elaborated it further in Lord Jim.

(Letters, p.XXX)

The statement that the use of Marlow came 'natural' to Conrad is something akin to the one about his 'intuitive' writing. Conrad had tried hard and for compelling reasons to develop his methods. He had happened upon the autobiographical method first. It was however incompatible with his views on the craft of fiction as he states, a few years later, in a letter to Galsworthy :

As against your people you must preserve an attitude

of perfect indifference, the part of creative power. A creator must be indifferent; because directly the 'Fiat' has issued from his lips, there are the creatures made in his image that'll try to drag him down from his eminence, -and belittle him by their worship.

(Aubry I, 11th Nov., 1901, p.301)

In order to be true to his ideal of detachment Conrad had to put somebody between himself and his experience. His theory of the art of fiction limited the range of his expression to the rendering, in absolute truthfulness, of his own sensations, in the garment or guise of strict objectivity. The attitude of unrestrained subjectivity towards his matter gave his work the nature of a 'confession'. His claim of absolute truthfulness and faith to his 'idea', to his 'gospel' and his 'conception' of life' (Aubry I, 11th Nov., 1901, p.301), and of the author's obligation to write from the 'depth' of his own inwardness', made the use of the autobiographical method, which would have exposed his life and innermost feeling to the public gaze, impossible for his fiction, above all so, when he was rendering his own experience unchanged, as he did in 'Youth' and 'Heart of Darkness'. The narrator as a medium lowers a sheltering veil, however transparent it may be, over the author. We know that Marlow only repeats what is whispered to him from that safe distance, but even so, Conrad can say all he has to say without laying himself open to a shameless gaze. Although ultimately the author's, the responsibility for the tale is burdened on the narrator. The story is removed one step from reality, and gains in/credibility. Concerning this aspect of his fiction Conrad states himself :

I know that a novelist lives in his work. He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, amongst

imaginary things, happenings, and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself. But the disclosure is not complete. He remains to a certain extent a figure behind the veil; a suspected rather than a seen presence -a movement and a voice behind the draperies of fiction. In these personal notes there is no such veil.

(A Personal Record, pp.8-9)

The use of a medium of narration proved helpful to Conrad for several reasons :

1. It enabled Conrad to render his own experience, and, at the same time, to retain that attitude of detachment towards the reader, which he deemed necessary for his art. Moreover, it provided him with a means for commenting on his narrative without coming to the fore himself.

2. It freed Conrad from a great perplexity, -from the necessity to provide a story as the main groundwork and hold of his narrative. He had as yet done this in a most unsatisfactory way, partly from lack of artistic skill, partly from temperamental disregard of action. The narrator provided a framework for the story by mainly talking to an audience with a setting of its own. It was intentionally connected with the matter recorded, e.g. by acquaintance with characters inside the story, or by the comment and casual interruptions of the narrator in addressing his audience personally. This gave the story an outer hold. At the same time the narrator is a character inside the story proper, thus providing a definite viewpoint and also a hold from inside. The whole narrative is shown to pass through one man's mind and in this way, the medium employed proved a substitute for the necessary coherence usually provided by the story.

For these reasons Marlow turned out to be a great relief for Conrad. After he had fulfilled his function so effectively in the stories of Youth, he was employed in novels (Lord Jim, Chance). We shall see however that, although providing sufficient hold for a short-story, Marlow, as substitute for the story in a novel, was inadequate.

3. Besides being a relief in the manner of composition, Marlow served as a control for the narrative. The author is mostly present in the audience and listens to his tale whilst writing it so to speak. There is a clear example for this function of Marlow in 'Heart of Darkness' :

He paused again as if reflecting, then added : 'Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know ...'

It had become so pitch-dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river. (p.94)

This passage shows further advantages which the use of a medium can provide. By rooting the tale in the familiar setting and persons of the frame-work, well-known in its kind to the reader, the most extravagant facts gained increased verisimilitude and authenticity. Moreover, a casual return from the story to the familiar surroundings of the setting, and a remark to the listeners, if skillfully done, may serve to appeal to the interest of the listener or reader, giving it the wanted direction and arousing it anew from time to time. At some points, Marlow plainly asks if his story is clear to the listeners,



Moreover, in such interruptions, he can comment on the story, and the author himself need not come to the fore.

Conrad was later to stress the necessity of the personal narrator in the preface to 'A Set of Six', referring to the story 'Gaspar Ruiz' :

The manner for the most part is that of General Santierra, and that old warrior I note with satisfaction, is very true to himself all through. Looking now dispassionately at all the various ways in which this story could have been presented I can't honestly think the general superfluous. It is he, an old man talking of the days of his youth, who characterizes the whole narrative and gives it an air of actuality which I doubt whether I could have achieved without his help. In the mere writing his existence of course was no help at all, because the whole thing, had to be carefully kept within the simple frame of his mind.

My present feeling is that the story could not have been told otherwise.

(Conrad's Prefaces, p.116)

4. It would seem that the 'simple frame of mind' was a help to Conrad all the same. Marlow also was a check on his unholy inclination for analysing characters. Being a character inside the story himself, as well as in the setting, he cannot possibly know what is going on inside the heads of the characters around him. At best he can guess at it, and even an occasional comment, if not too elaborate, is not out of place. He can only see the characters from outside, and this is precisely where Conrad's strength lay. At the same time however, Marlow provides a perfectly credible outlet for the 'inner monologue'. On the whole he takes no decisive part in the action. He is merely an onlooker, often the 'confessor' of the central characters, and receiver of confidences for the rest (Jim, Flora de Barral, Kurtz). In the same way as the 'confidante' or chambermaid in French classical drama

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provided a chance for her mistress to reveal her motives to the audience, so Marlow, -the benevolent old man and patron-, by patiently listening to his adopted protégés and acquaintances, gives them the chance to unburden their consciences and reveal their hidden motives and secret impulses. The frank evidence of their inner struggle allows us to perceive, -at least as far as Conrad could do so himself-, the 'secrets of their heart'. The confidences of Marlow's acquaintances shed light on the central character, Marlow however gives unity and coherence to all these different parts of the narrative, through his person as well as through his efforts to coordinate all the various information he gets, in his craving to understand the main character. Thus the fatal consequences of Conrad's grouping of episodes for the sake of psychological interest are avoided. Naturally Marlow soon became Conrad's 'deus ex machina', conjured up whenever he found himself in a tight corner.

This function of the personal narrator certainly was in Conrad's mind when he wrote in the preface to 'Under Western Eyes', referring to the old teacher of languages :

He himself has been much criticized; but I will not at this late hour undertake to justify his existence. He was useful to me and therefore I think that he must be useful to the reader both in the way of comment and by the part he plays in the development of the story. In my desire to produce the effect of actuality it seemed to me indispensable to have an eye-witness of the transaction in Geneva. I need also a sympathetic friend for Miss Haldin, who otherwise would have been too much alone and unsupported to be perfectly credible.

(Conrad's Prefaces, p.124)

Conrad repeatedly states that his consistent use of personal narrators in novels has been the subject of much criticism.

By the time Conrad started to write 'Youth', he had drawn his lesson from the 'Return'. He decided to drop his manner of analysing and explaining through verbiage without really showing what he wanted to convey. In his next story, he consequently tried to show everything. He states in a letter to Garnett

So, the thing is vivid - and seen? It is good news to me, because, unable to try for something better, higher, I did try for the visual effect, and I must trust to that for the effect of the whole story from which I cannot evolve any meaning.

(Letters, Sat.Aug., 98, p.134)

Although Conrad was complaining about his 'lost meaning' which he could not 'evolve', the conviction fortunately grew in him, that he was only able to render things from outside through their appearance, -which is the true way of art-. This is stated in a number of remarks which date from this time, and it is plainly visible in his books, that he abandons all efforts at analysis in favour of a visual presentation of his story. What he 'left alone' now however he considered as 'better and higher' than what he was trying to achieve.

## 1. Youth

This story was written with extreme ease within a few days. The material lay ready in his mind, and he had happened upon the method which he deemed adequate to its rendering.

In 'Youth' Marlow-Conrad recalls his first trip to the East. It is Marlow's first appearance. He is brought in briefly though clumsily, and immediately gets under way with his tale. The story is simple in outline and chronological in development. There is next to no analysis, but a fair amount of descriptive passages, which however do not become obtrusive. All is primarily seen, and nothing is explained a priori.

Conrad called the story 'a sort of sea-narrative without head or tail' (Aubry I, p.241, to E.L.Sanderson, June 15, 98). Like the Nigger it is but the story of a voyage. This fact, apart from its technical merits, gives it a direction of movement and unity of time. The ship as the setting gives it unity of place. The ambition of the author, as Marlow states for him at the beginning of the story, goes beyond the mere rendering of this voyage :

You fellows know that there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence. (p.4)

Apart from the narrator, only a few people are sketched briefly. They are shown from outside and, being sailors with simple minds, offer no temptation for analysis.

The shipmaster had blue eyes in that old face of his, which were amazingly like a boy's, with that candid expression some quite common men preserve to the end of their days by a rare internal gift of simplicity of heart and rectitude of soul. (p.4)

From the very beginning of the story, the movement of action is paralysed. The ship is a ruin, and whenever the crew tries to get on its way, it is held up, and must return to have the ship overhauled. In fact, although it is overhauled several times, and although the crew struggles gallantly for months to reach its port of destination, -Bankok-, it never arrives. The ship burns out, off the coast of Java, and the crew has to abandon it in open boats. After many days of hunger, toil and misery, they reach the east. The action is essentially a record of the circumstances which delay and check the forward movement of the story, and which finally foil the intention of the crew, cheating it of the fruit of its wearisome toils. The story is pervaded by a sense of haunting inertia, of the futility of all action and of all human effort, because of the certainty of failure and death, -the ultimate outcome of all human endeavour-. As such, it would seem to deserve its title only in a sarcastic sense, proving the hope and ardour of youthful aspirations to be utterly foolish in the face of an unrelenting and cruel reality. And yet there is also the undaunted courage and zest of the crew which reaches the east, despite the loss of the ship. Conrad however was never young in his fiction. This episode of his youth is mainly seen through the eyes of a disenchanted and defeated old man. He compares the aspirations of the outset of his life with its actual achievement, and he is bitter about it. He replied to Wells' criticism of 'Youth' :

As to the flaws of 'Youth' their existence is indisputable. I felt what you say myself - in a way. The feeling however which induced me to write that story was genuine (for once) and so strong that it poked its way through the narrative (which it certainly defaces) in a good many places.

(Aubry I, 6th Sept., 98, pp.248)



The 'places' meant are certainly those where Marlow, rather obtrusively, offers cynical and often sarcastic remarks on the story to his audience, with the invitation to 'pass the bottle'. This is Conrad's rudimentary manner of connecting the framework with the story proper. It is clumsy, as compared with the inimitable mastery with which the same is done in 'Heart of Darkness'. Marlow does not fulfil his function very effectively. He is brought in clumsily, with an audience which, from the point of view of the story, is too obviously superfluous. It has no task other than listening and passing the bottle at times, when addressed by Marlow. Apart from the fact that Marlow is the central character of framework and story, the only connection between both central character and audience is this merely formal ground. As the first attempt at this new method however, it stands well.

## 2. Heart of Darkness.

Conrad had started to write Lord Jim along with 'Youth'. After the latter was completed, he took up the Rescue again and wrote to Garnett :

The fear of this horror coming back to me makes me shiver. As it is it has destroyed already the little belief in myself I used to have, ...

(Letters Sat.Aug., 98, p.134)

As in the case of the Nigger, his power and confidence of writing returned as soon as he started on 'Heart of Darkness'. He wrote to Garnett :

O!Lord! And I write! I write! I write! Certainly. Write quick. Not quick enough to make up for the frightful leeway. But I write. And à propos writing. Have you seen p.III of H.o.D. My dear fellow I daren't send you my MS. I feel it would worry you.

(Letters, Good Friday 99, p.150)

Conrad completed the story with comparative ease. By this point he had grown more assured of the value of his art. He stopped discussing his books with Garnett and delivering every page to him for inspection.

In 'Heart of Darkness' Conrad aimed at rendering the gist of the crucial experience of his life, -the all-important sinister truth which had been revealed to him at the Congo. In this story the handling of the medium Marlow has grown masterly. Again Conrad provides a setting and a circle of listeners, -a framework for the story-. It is intrinsically connected with the story by many threads of meaning. The narrator started his trip from the very spot where he sits relating his story, and he returns there at the end. As in his sea-stories this

provides an inner hold. The very atmosphere in which the characters of the framework live and breathe gives birth to the mood which pervades the story and peters out in it. Throughout the story, the narrator returns at intervals to the setting familiar to us and to the familiar circle of people who listen to him. In this way he endows the most fantastic moments of his tale with the aspect of haunting reality. The story is just as real as that well-known figure before us, of whose familiar presence we are occasionally made aware. In fact, Marlow pulls his full weight, to constantly remind us of his personal sincerity and integrity.

'Heart of Darkness' is the story of a white man who, from a city in Europe, went across the sea and up a river into the dark heart of Africa. Step by step he moves away from the reality familiar to us, into a world growing more and more fantastic, as he approaches the culminating point of his experience. The sinister aspect of the nature surrounding him is ever increasing and is pregnant with ominous meaning. The looming shadow of imminent disaster reduces all human action to insignificance. As far as details are seen and facts rendered, they serve to evoke sensations which are in accord with the general mood. The important fact for example, that Kurtz was on purpose left alone on his station, so that he may fall prey to the dreadful passions which the wilderness evoked in him, is almost concealed by the suggestive hints and the general apathy and unconcern towards action, which the oppressive gloom of his surroundings has produced in the narrator. In fact the action is a mere undercurrent, and repeated reading is required, if the groundwork of bare fact is to be grasped.

The spiritual concern, on the other hand, is overwhelmingly strong and determines the aspect of the surrounding matter. Scene by scene a landscape of the soul, with contorted shapes and elementary colours, -blazing days and sinister nights-, unfolds before our eyes. The climax takes place on a pitch-dark night. It is not a clash of rivals, but the struggle of a human soul against its monstrous passions, accompanied by the throbbing of drums and by the plaintive and sorrowful yells of the savages fantastically moving around their blazing fires in the nearby wilderness.

In this story everything is essentially seen. Conrad, for the sake of visual effects, has completely dropped the method of analysis of mind and soul and has attained to a mastery of poetic expression in prose unparalleled in English fiction. His characters are entirely seen from outside. Kurtz, the man at the heart of the tale, is brought in carefully and masterfully. After the stage is set, we have a first casual reference to him, and then one remark follows another. He is constantly referred to in conversations and gradually becomes the main topic, thus being viewed by ever different characters. Since we know these characters, we gradually gain a store of knowledge about Kurtz, knowing much more about him in fact than does any single character or even the narrator. When he finally makes his long-expected appearance, we have already enveloped him in a mesh of contradictory knowledge. Yet there is a mystery about him, so fascinating to the reader that it more than equals the curiosity which, in the conventional story, the latter would have in the progress of action. It is partly for this reason that Kurtz's short performance at the climax has a flavour of

disappointment, when compared with the amount of curiosity Conrad succeeds in arousing in the reader at the stages of the journey preceding the meeting with him. The story seems to have no other purpose in fact than to bring us face to face with Kurtz. Witnessing his dilemma in that horrible night scene, nearly perceiving his mystery, - his 'Secret of Heart' -, is not a sufficient substitute for a climax of action, the more so since all action, incident and description, revolve around it. The characters are mere accessories to Kurtz. They are real only in as far as they serve for the elucidation of the central character, -the bearer of truth. We scarcely even know on first reading what exactly the most evil character in the book, -the manager, has done, other than that he is mean and greedy and wants Kurtz to perish. As far as the characters are outlined however, they are entirely revealed from outside, characterised by their looks, their behaviour, telling gestures, little habits and suggestive speeches. The manager has his significant smile, and the Russian his farcical gait in the semblance of a naive child. In the case of Kurtz, the rendering from outside, -first presentation in a few suggestive phrases-, conveys more than Conrad's craving in that night-scene, to drag out the 'horrible secret of his heart' in ever so many words. Marlow was not expecting to see what Kurtz did in the interior, but all the time 'had been looking forward to a talk with Kurtz'. (p.128)

'The man presented himself as a voice.' (p.129) He 'made the strange discovery that he had never imagined him as doing ... but as discoursing.' (p.128)

'Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. ...That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all



his gifts the one that stood out pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words, his gift of expression ...'

(p.129)

As such Kurtz is presented to us. Being near death when we first meet him, he really cannot do much :

I could not hear a sound but through my glasses saw a thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks.

He looked at least seven feet long. His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide - it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. He must have been shouting.

(p.151)

From the very beginning of the story it is made evident, that all that happens is aimless and utterly futile. This is however not plainly stated, but becomes apparent from the nature of the events :

.. we came upon a man of war anchored off the coast. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long eight-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the eight-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech - and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight;..

(p.70)

A horn tooted to the right, and I saw the black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way of anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on.

(p.72)

Another report from the cliff made me think suddenly of that ship of war I had seen firing into a continent. It was the same kind of ominous voice; ..

(p.73)

This way of looking at things conveys a sense of inertia and essential futility. It can by no means create curiosity as to the progress of action. The course of the story is not determined by a coherent pattern of action and does not aim at a dramatic climax. It is rather a sequence of pictures and images which are essentially static, and by their aspect, -by the emotional and intellectual angle in which they are seen-, convey a peculiar meaning. Here is our first impression of the dark continent :

We called at some more places with farcical names where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf ...; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair .. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares.

(pp.70-71)

Conrad's truth is essentially shown and conveyed through the senses, through shape and colour in black grey and white, through sound (the fierce and sorrowful yells of the savages), smell (the rotting hippo-meat of cannibals in the steamer), and taste (the slimy taste of the water, producing a sense of depraved pleasure), and touch. The meaning of the tale is thus essentially rendered

through the aspect of the surrounding matter. In its magnificence of presentation, it often gains universal significance, assuming the quality of a myth. The settings are elementary, -rocks, sand, mud and slime; river and forest, glaring light and lurking darkness- . There is no friendly colour and no graceful shape. Take the description of the central station e.g., a scene of human endeavour :

A rocky cliff appeared, mounds of turned-up earth by the shore, houses on a hill, others, with iron roofs amongst a waste of excavations, or hanging to the declivity. A continuous noise of the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation. A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants. A jetty projected into the river. A blinding sunlight drowned all this at times in a sudden recrudescence of glare.

(p.72)

In the course of this examination, the quoting of more of those splendidly evoked images of decay, destruction and death would lead us too far from our path. We shall however quote one more passage in which the earth gains the aspect of Hell.

A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound around their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rythmically clinking.

.. these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men, -men, I tell you.

I avoided a vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope --

At last I got under the trees. My purpose was to stroll into the shade for a moment; but no sooner within than it seemed to me I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno. The rapids were near, and an uninterrupted, uniform, headlong, rushing noise

filled the mournful stillness of the grove, where not a breath stirred, not a leaf moved, with a mysterious sound - as though the tearing pace of the launched earth had suddenly become audible.

Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die.

They were dying slowly - it was very clear ... they were nothing earthly now - nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. - These moribund shapes were as free as air - and nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eye-lids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly ...

He had tied a bit of worsted white round his neck.-  
-- I looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas.

Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner : his brother-phantom rested its forehead as if overcome with a great weariness; and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence.

(pp.73-76)

As compared with the passages quoted from previous books, this is all seen, and is intensely and hauntingly alive. Conrad has abandoned his manner of naming everything several times. The words are used with care and economy. The phrases are short on the whole, and precise. We are but vaguely aware of what Marlow, -the central character of story and setting-, does throughout the narrative. Nevertheless we know all the time that he is observing



and rendering his visual impression. He perceives everything from outside, and in his manner of rendering impressions everything assumes symbolic significance and coherence. The whole of his experience is permeated with one strong, unbroken mood. It colours and pervades every scrap of his story, welding it into one piece. This manner of relating his subjective impressions without any attempt at establishing a coherent pattern of action, degrades the latter to a mere stimulus for sensations. We do not learn what horrible crimes Kurtz has committed, nor does Marlow expressly try to enlighten us on that point. However, the visual results of Kurtz's orgies with the savages are rendered so impressively, that no report, of his witness e.g., the Russian, could have done the like :

I directed my glass to the house. There were no signs of life, but there was the ruined roof, the long mud wall peeping above the grass, with three little square window-holes, no two of the same size; all this brought within reach of my hand, as it were. And then I made a brusque movement, and one of the remaining posts of that vanished fence leaped up in the field of my glass. You remember I told you I had been struck at the distance by certain attempts at ornamentation, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place. Now I had suddenly a nearer view, and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow. Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing - food for thought and also for the vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky; but at all events food for such ants as were industrious enough to ascend the pole. They would have been even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house. Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way. I was not so shocked as you may think. The start back I had given was really nothing but a movement of surprise. I had expected to see a knob of wood there, you



know. I returned deliberately to the first I had seen - and there it was, black, dried, sunken with closed eye-lids - a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of teeth, was smiling too, smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber.

(pp.146-147)

The use of the glass here applies a sort of optic precision to Marlow's observation. The little gesture of throwing back his head makes him intensely real to us and through him, the object of observation also. This fantastic episode is given the nature of undeniable fact by Marlow's occasionally colloquial tone, which entered Conrad's prose with Marlow, and was such as would be used by intimate friends. No amount of explanation could however have yielded the meaning of this passage so impressively and with such morbid intensity as the mere visual rendering. The last phrase is a more cruel joke on the belief of the beyond than any declaration of disbelief could have been. The truth, rather than being shown as a 'kernel', comes out like one of those 'misty halos' in Marlow's tale. In the first half of the story Conrad seems to have taken his lesson to heart. To his inestimable advantage he has resigned himself to an entirely visual rendering. But by now, he is approaching the core of his truth and Marlow cannot let such an opportunity pass without adding a little comment, and explaining the bearing of this excellently presented observation on Kurtz's moral character :

... I want you clearly to understand that there was nothing exactly profitable in these heads being there. They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him - some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge

came to him at last - only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early , and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude - and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core .... I put down the glass, and the head that had appeared near enough to be spoken to seemed at once to have leaped away from me into inaccessible distance.

(pp.147-148)

Evidently Marlow, unlike an earlier Conrad, does not pretend to know what is going on in other people's heads. He only comments on that which he can guess and conclude from his observations. Even so, this comment considerably slows down the narrative, as the passage quoted proves. Whilst viewing this horrible spectacle and literally fetching it up from the distance for inspection, he had a conversation about Kurtz with the Russian. Although this conversation puts the final seal on Marlow's judgment, it is virtually suspended for a long time and the Russian utterly forgotten as soon as Marlow's explanation starts. Apart from the indirectly interwoven ironic and sarcastic comment, this direct comment of Marlow makes for more lengthiness. Our credulity is considerably strained when the Russian amazingly re-appears after this lengthy reflection and the forgotten conversation is resumed.

When Conrad approaches the final stage of this drama of a soul, -the revelation of Kurtz's horrible secret-, he is so enthralled by his 'truth', that he relapsed into his worst manner of writing. This is the more obvious when contrasted with the excellent passage above. We shall only quote the worst part of a long passage, in which Kurtz is supposed to confess his truth to the confessor Marlow :

This clearly was not a case for fisticuffs, even apart from the very natural aversion I had to beat that Shadow - this wandering and tormented thing. 'You will be lost', I said, -'utterly lost'-.

I've been telling you what we said - repeating the phrases we pronounced - but what's the good? They were common everyday words - the familiar vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life. But what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares. Soul! If anybody had ever struggled with a soul, I am the man. And I wasn't arguing with a lunatic either. Believe me or not, his intelligence was perfectly clear - concentrated, it is true, upon himself with horrible intensity, yet clear, and therein was my only chance - barring, of course, the killing him there and then, which wasn't so good, on account of unavoidable noise. But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had, for my sins, I suppose - to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself too. I saw it - I heard it (What did he see and hear?) I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul (!!!) that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself. I kept my head pretty well; but when I had him at last stretched on the couch, I wiped my forehead, while my legs shook under me as though I had carried half a ton on my back down that hill.

(pp.163-164)

This at least is something we can really imagine. A few pages further on, Kurtz, the 'remarkable man', pronounces a judgment upon the 'adventures of his soul on this earth'. This fundamentally is the subject of Conrad's tale. After Kurtz's death Marlow-Conrad remained to dream the nightmare to the end, and to pronounce the final judgment on life, -that 'droll thing'-, which is a 'mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose'. He confesses that, falling ill after that adventure, he has

'wrestled with death', and adds another few pages of eloquence, revolving around the unfathomable secret of his truth. The end of 'Heart of Darkness', -when he comes to the 'grand guignol' finish, -his meeting with Kurtz's betrothed-, is its worst part. If only Conrad had followed Wells' advice and managed to 'leave his facts alone to speak for themselves stark and naked as they were', his story would have been the better for it. But for the sake of his conclusion and truth, which was to come out strongest in the final lie, he almost succeeds in destroying the unique effect of his excellent tale. In the same way his truth had to shine through Abdulla's final appeal to the 'Merciful and Compassionate' in the face of Allmayer's seedy end. That final cruel joke which is supposed to sum up the meaning of the whole, and is meant to brand it on our mind, is an extravagant luxury at the expense of the artistic value of 'Heart of Darkness'.

Let us however not unduly deprecate Conrad's merits. His tremendous progress could be shown in a number of detailed passages, -e.g. by his comment on contemporary society in contrast to the symbolic rendering of the trading post-, or by the entire outside- rendering of the death of his helmsman as opposed to the monologue of Willems at the moment of his death. The peculiar twist of Conrad's vision in 'Heart of Darkness', although at times trembling on the verge of insanity, makes it something apart in English fiction. But, as happiness and horror can be more perfect and more intense in dreams than ever in life, so 'Heart of Darkness' is, by its very quality of nightmare and dream, more alive than any conventionally 'real' piece of fiction ever could be.



We are carefully led through the gate of the necropolis with the knitting hags, -through the gates from which people don't normally return-. We pass beyond a great sea, the Acheron, up a primeval river, from a central station to a trading station and outpost, lying on the verge of civilisation and in the very heart of the Inferno, - to the beginning of time and the utmost end of the inhabited world.

In spite of the entire abeyance of the story before the vision, there is a strong unity and coherence in the narrative. Many images are of universal symbolic significance. There are cross-references and meanings which play backwards and forwards over the whole narrative, stitching it together into one significant piece of meaning. There is e.g. the sepulchral city, -as the entrance and outlet of this world-, or the knitting hags who guard the entrance to the nightmare-world, and who are repeatedly referred to inside the story. There are also, in setting and story, references to the primeval state of man. There is the suggestive and ironic meaning of the word 'restraint', repeated, as are certain gestures, mannerisms of speech or key-words. All these are 'leitmotive', linking the parts of the narrative together.

What then mainly welds the tale together is the unbroken strength and intensity of that mood which, evoked by a singular confined angle of vision, pervades it. It is more precisely the reflection of that mood in colour and shape, in sound and taste and touch, in lurid lights and sinister shadow, in thought and impulse as well as emotion and sensation. It is the very limitation of vision to one exclusive angle, together with its claim to totality, which welds the narrative into one piece.



The strong impact of the tale is however also due to technical devices. As in the Nigger and in 'Youth', it is the report on one trip, which ends and begins at the same point. It is bound together by the framework, which is intrinsically connected with the story by many threads of meaning, and marks its beginning and end. The strongest link is the person of the narrator who is the centre of the audience and of the story, -the pair of eyes and the mind through ~~the~~ which the whole tale is transmitted to us-. The narrator is ever there as our centre of vision and, in the latter half, as a constant source of comment. He knits the narrative together from inside. However distorted Conrad's vision may seem, it is firmly rooted in the familiar reality of the setting. Whenever we come to one of those climaxes of seeming absurdity which arise in the course of the narrative, Marlow interrupts, addresses his audience, and we are fetched back for relief as it were, into this familiar atmosphere. We get a respite for drawing breath.

The advantages of this method are evident. The story is removed from the plane of immediate reality, -as a play on the stage is separated from life and the audience. This enables the author to render many things which would have been unbearable otherwise. Moreover the narrative gains in depth and richness by being put on the second remove and being contrasted with the reality next to us and familiar to us. The manner in which Marlow moves away from the scene before our eyes, with those people well-known to our mind, to the sepulchral city, from there over the ocean, and then step by step over many almost insurmountable obstacles into a different world with unknown horrors, is unsurpassed in English fiction. His return in the same way from the

nightmare-world to the place where we sit and listen to him amongst the audience, establishes a strong unity of time and place, although we are not aware of a logical sequence of coherent action - of the course and movement of the story-.

'Heart of Darkness' is a triumph for Conrad's manner of showing the inner significance of a situation by means of its enveloping atmosphere, -through the surface of facts-, by way of his peculiar 'angles and lighting'. The conventional qualities of the story are neglected, but in the face of such an achievement, it would be heresy to demand a conventional story. And yet, we could ask whether the conjunction of this excellence of vision with swift action, would not make for yet greater perfection in the craft of fiction.

### 3. Lord Jim

When Conrad started to write Lord Jim at the beginning of 1898, he intended to make it a short story. Soon he had to lay it aside, till Sept. 1899, when he took it up again and in a short time finished it. Although he had, to great advantage, used the autobiographical method through his medium Marlow in the preceding stories, he was still dissatisfied with his achievement, with style as well as formal aspects of his writing. When he had taken up Jim again he wrote :

... words, groups of words, words standing alone, are symbols of life, have the power in their sound or their aspect to present the very thing you wish to hold up before the mental vision of your readers. The things 'as they are' exist in words. Therefore words should be handled with care lest the picture, the image of truth abiding in facts, should become distorted or blurred.

These are the considerations for a mere craftsman - you may say, and you may also conceivably say that I have nothing else to trouble my head about. However, the whole truth lies in the presentation; therefore the expression should be studied in the interest of veracity. This is the only morality of art apart from subject.

(Aubry I, 9th Oct., 99, to (Sir) Hugh Clifford, p.280)

And a short time later Conrad writes to E.L.Sanderson:

Doubts assail me from every side. The doubt of form-, the doubt of tendency, - a mistrust of my own conceptions, -and scruples of the moral order.

(Aubry I, p.287, Oct. 26, 99)

Lord Jim was the first full-scale novel after the Outcast. In the meantime Conrad had finally failed to complete the Rescue. The Nigger, because of its lack of story, cannot be considered as a full-scale novel.

It is rather a panorama or large canvas with essentially static figures. Jim is a renewed attempt at the novel. By now, Conrad had gained some ground in the development of method. He made full use of the experience gained.

As in the Outcast, Conrad starts the narrative as an objective observer. In the first three chapters he renders a tale of hearsay in a well-written, compact story. First, we are shown what Jim looks like. Then we get his story in retrospect with occasional glimpses into his mind. The crucial accident in the third chapter takes place in a magnificent setting. In its writing, Conrad had indulged in his tendency to create a dense atmosphere, as a reflection of the general mood of the story. He also shows the slow evolution of Jim's thought at length, and again we have the well-known impression of stillness and paralysis which precedes the failure and surrender of will in Conrad's books; in Jim it is a sudden surrender to the instinct of fear. We never really learn how Jim jumped, just as we never really know what crimes Kurtz has committed. The very core of the matter ever remains veiled in a misty haze. The rendering of the crucial act, around which virtually the whole book revolves, is shirked, and we have at best a short glimpse of it. The whole of the Nigger was hinged upon James' Wait mystery; in 'Heart of Darkness', we know vaguely about a great and horrible disaster connected with Kurtz' mystery, but it is a thing neither for this world nor for Conrad nor for us to know. We are disappointed by the vagueness and inconclusiveness of its end. The real heart of the story, just like Kurtz, is a vague and elusive phantom. This witch-hunting however keeps us in breathless suspense. Lord Jim is hinged upon another

such 'mystery', -the whole book is an attempt at the elucidation of the Why of Jim's initial failure.

As in the case of the preceding novels, the objective rendering of his tale was, without the help, -the outlet and structural support of Marlow-, a heavy trial on Conrad. He wrote to E.L.Sanderson :

The unreality of it seems to enter one's real life, to penetrate into the bones ...

One's will becomes a slave of hallucinations .. and waits on imagination alone. A strange state, a trying experience, a kind of fiery trial of untruthfulness.

(Aubry I, 12th Oct., 99, p.283)

At the same time he wrote to Garnett :

Jim's dragging his slow length along.

(Letters, 13th Nov., 99, p.153)

As in the Outcast, the story breaks off at the climax, and the crucial events are rendered in flash-backs. Dramatic action is almost never seen directly. It is invariably rendered indirectly, -in retrospect-, through the mind and eyes of an onlooker or actor. At the first crucial moment of the story, Conrad deliberately switches over from How things happened to Why they happened. Again he drops the story for the sake of his concern. He tries to trace the nature of the motives underlying the fatal act of the hero. After the crucial event has taken place, Conrad undertakes a systematic attempt to analyse motives. He stages an official inquiry into Jim's case, putting Jim into the dock. That however does not come off, the jury wanting nothing but facts, and Jim being incapable of clearly expressing his excuse or truth. The tale of hearsay at bottom of this story should have been closed with the trial. By now however, Conrad is involved in his tale and changes over to the method congenial to him. Jim could not possibly say in



court what Conrad would have had him say. The story, having to slow down for the trial, is almost brought to a standstill by the occasional glimpses we have of Jim's torturing thoughts. The salvation is again Marlow. Conrad puts him into the audience, Jim perceives him, and of course their glances meet. By a misunderstanding, they come face to face in front of the courtroom, and Marlow gets down on Jim, never to let him go again. Before this is related however, Conrad provides an audience for Marlow, out of the blue so to speak, handing the story over to him, and sending him off in search of his mystery. Through his mouth Conrad can now freely pursue his concern. Marlow states ~~in~~ before his first exit :

'I've led him by the hand. I have paraded him before you.' (Lord Jim, p.164)

Later, when he resumes his part, he comments on the secondary characters :

They exist as if under an enchanter's wand. But the figure round which all these are grouped - that one lives ... (p.243)

The use of his medium, together with the autobiographical method, brought Conrad the same relief as they had repeatedly done before. He tells Garnett :

I am still at Jim.  
I am old and sick and in debt - but lately I've found I can still write - it comes! it comes! - and I am young and healthy and rich.

(Letters, 26th March, 1900 p.169)

Marlow now proceeds to a more thorough examination of the matter in question than any court-inquiry could have done. He meets Jim periodically, during the trial and for many years afterwards, having appointed himself guardian

of the young man, and watching over his fate. In their most important meeting, Jim seeks relief in a confession, i.e. Conrad gives his own version of the crucial event.

After he has probed Jim and found it impossible to fathom him, Marlow tries devious ways. He parades a number of witnesses, and by means of their reports and views works forwards and backwards over the crucial event. Yet he cannot extract the secret. He brings in people who have no bearing whatever on the story, apart from their opinion of Jim, and who disappear after having fulfilled this function. And yet he provides them with a story of their own., in order to qualify their angle of judgment. He freely shifts in time and place for the sake of these reports, and often has them from third or fourth or even fifth hand. Each view adds a facet to our total impression of Jim's character, -whether it comes from Brierly, Chester, the French officer, or the chief engineer of the Patna. Those viewpoints are contradictory to a certain extent, but all tend to the explanation of the moral and psychological problem at the heart of the tale. For more than hundred pages the story virtually stands still, and we almost lose the sense of time and place, as these parts of the narrative, in their chronological sequence, are not so grouped as to carry the story on.

On the other hand these swift changes, -in time, from past to present and future, in place, to various towns and posts along the coasts of the Pacific, in viewpoint to narrators who just appear and throw a glimpse on Jim before disappearing, bringing in this way a piece of witness from remote hearsay-, all give the narrative richness and depth. No doubt, this is a great improvement

on the Outcast. The advantage gained however, is again wasted by the incoherent grouping and frequent irrelevance of great parts of the narrative as to the course and movement and coherence of the story. The impression of disorder and incoherence arising from the reading of the greater, -the middle-part of the book, is increased by Marlow's elaborate comment and Conrad's inconsistencies of method. Often enough they are caused by the author's personal interest in the main concern of the tale.

In those long conversations between Jim and Marlow their viewpoints are at times not clearly separated. Thus it is impossible to know who is really thinking or speaking. Marlow's reflections are often so long that the author drops his guise, coming forth, and addressing the reader frankly (p.112) . At the end of chapter XXI, Marlow pretends to finish his tale and to walk out. But soon after the beginning of the next chapter he imperceptibly comes in again, to our great surprise. Obviously Conrad needed him and was still finding it too difficult to handle the story without him. In fact, without the hold of the narrator, Jim, from the point of view of coherence of action, would have been disastrous. Although Marlow's constant lengthy comments slow down the narrative considerably, he is nevertheless an indispensable link in it.

Lastly, on reading, we have, as ever in Conrad's books, a strong sense of the futility of the whole matter. All of what this lengthy searching of hearts brings to light amounts to virtually nothing. Ultimately we do not get hold of the idea and the truth that is to be conveyed. It all remains a mystery, -inscrutable, inconceivable, inexplicable, imperceptible, intangible, impossible and whatever else it is called. There is always the suspicion that the author himself does not know it and is trying

to get hold of it, in the creative act and through it -that the search for truth is dearer to him than truth itself-. Early in the book, when talking to the chief engineer of the 'Patna', and 'indulging in the eccentric hope of hearing something explanatory of the famous affair from his point of view', Marlow confesses :

.. I have a distinct notion I wished to find something. Perhaps, unconsciously, I hoped I would find that something, some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse. I see well enough now that I hoped for the impossible - for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation... I can't explain. You may call it an unhealthy curiosity if you like; but I have a distinct notion I wished to find something. Perhaps, unconsciously, I hoped I would find that something, some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse. I see well enough that I hoped for the impossible - for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation, of the uneasy doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death ... Did I believe in a miracle? and why did I desire it so ardently? Was it for my own sake that I wished to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow whom I had never seen before, but whose appearance alone added a touch of personal concern to the thoughts suggested by the knowledge of his weakness - made it a thing of mystery and terror - like a hint of a destructive fate ready for us all whose youth - in its day - had resembled his youth? I fear that such was the secret motive of my prying. I was, and no mistake, looking for a miracle. The only thing that at this distance of time strikes me as miraculous is the extent of my imbecility. I positively hoped to obtain from that battered and shady invalid some exorcism against the ghost of doubt.

(Lord Jim, p.37)

From chapter XVIII, Jim's story proper (i.e. what happened to him in the way of action after the crucial incident) starts to get under way. We always follow him

from afar with Marlow, or read an occasional letter Marlow receives. Sometimes we have a close-up, when the latter happens to meet him. Conrad, possibly to escape from the necessity of inventing, chooses the familiar Malayan setting for the final phase of the book. The main events are told by Jim in the usual retrospective manner. Their sequence is torn up by occasional switches to the present, and accordingly the dramatic quality is watered down, although this subject-matter could have made for swift action if related directly. But Conrad just does not seem to be interested in that - Jim has long walks with Marlow, relating his adventures, as if Conrad had deliberately chosen this method to kill the dramatic interest. Marlow is merely a delaying and passive presence, interrupting Jim's report intermittently by brief questions and lengthy trains of thought.

At this point of the book Conrad however, seems to have remembered that in order to achieve popularity he needed a story with definite qualities. From the outset of this part he accumulates the requisites for the traditional adventure-story, and seems to call this intention to his mind, when he makes Marlow exclaim :

From day to day I learned more of the story.  
The story! Haven't I heard the story! I've heard it  
on the march, in camp ... (Lord Jim, p.192)

Of course there should be a love-story in a successful novel, and Marlow reminds us : 'Remember this is a love-story I am telling you now' (p.218), and again : 'This, let me remind you again, is a love-story ..' (p.219) Conrad's strength did not exactly lie in rendering love-stories, and these remarks sound like an exasperated reaction on the necessity to provide such a story at all.



Moreover, the comment following upon that last remark is so ironic, that it is evident that he did not in the least enjoy writing love-stories, -that he did not write and could not write for mere entertainment and the pleasure of the reader. His very aim was to stir the latter as deeply as possible by his truth, not to flatter his taste and help him to cultivate his self-righteous complacency.

Throughout the latter half of the book the action is, on the whole, fairly sustained, although told on the second remove from us. Conrad may have felt at times that Marlow, with his futile obsession and tendency of checking the story, started to become a bore. He amazingly breaks up the audience, -whose existence we had long before forgotten-, comes to the fore himself, and says that '... the last image of that incomplete story, its incompleteness itself, and the very tone of the speaker, had made discussion vain and comment impossible (p.248)'. He externally changes the method of narration, by putting a 'privileged friend' of Marlow to the foreground, for a moment. He is only a threadbare excuse for good old Marlow. This friend - an interested member of the discarded audience-, soon receives letters from Marlow, containing the 'last word of the story'. It is related by the man Brown, who dealt Jim's fate, and who was, of course, soon traced to a hospital by Marlow, thereby getting the chance of confessing before he died. And here is Marlow back again in a different guise.

This report is sustained and uninterrupted, as the narrator is essentially a man of action. It is felt as a great relief, that after the permanent stagnation and immobility which weighed down the middle-part of the book, the end comes in a quick move. The final climax is seen and shown directly, and is finished swiftly.

In Lord Jim, we find all the various methods which Conrad had so far employed. At the beginning, he starts the objective rendering of a story. As in the Outcast, he interrupts it at the climax and indulges in analysis and elucidation of the motives of the central character. For this reason he drops the action almost entirely for a long stretch in the book. There is a big unmoving lump of matter in its middle part where the story is, for the sake of psychological and moral issues, deliberately sacrificed, to such an extent that the structure of the whole seems severely unbalanced. If we neglect the short initial story, the book distinctly falls into two parts. The first half essentially contains the analysis of a situation, which, beyond a constant negative definition of its aim, does not yield much sense, and is therefore essentially inconclusive. The second half contains a steady development of action which, although seen indirectly, is at times dramatic and comes to a genuine dramatic conclusion. The story in this part is a proper vessel for the other aspects of the novel.

Neither Conrad's search for a mystery, -his obsession for a truth-, nor the person of the narrator, can but approximately compensate for the neglect of straightforward and coherent action, -the story-. Although Marlow, as a medium of narration, served excellently for the short-story, he proved inadequate and insufficient as substitute for the story in this novel.

Edward Garnett immediately pointed this flaw of structure out to Conrad, who agreed with him :

Yes! You've put your finger on the plague spot. The division of the book into two parts which is the basis of your criticism demonstrates to me once more your amazing insight.

Nobody'll see it, but you have detected me falling back into my lump of clay I had been lugging up from the bottom of the pit, with the idea of breathing big life into it. And all I have done was to let it fall with a silly crash. For what is fundamentally wrong with the book is want of power - the cause and effect - ... I mean the want of illuminating imagination.

I haven't been strong enough to breathe the right sort of life into my clay - the revealing life.

(Letters, 12th Nov., 1900, p.171)

At the same time he wrote to a French friend, commenting on Lord Jim :

Comme oeuvre d'art cette machine n'existe pas. Peut-être y verrez-vous quelque intention. Pour ma part je regarde ce monstre avec un ébahissement d'avoir fait cela. C'est lourd comme une pierre. Mais peut-être les pierres ont-elles une âme, une toute petite âme séchée dans le grès.

(Lettres Françaises, à A.H.D. Davray, 20th Nov., 1900, p.41)

In his endeavour to attain perfection in his craft, Conrad certainly drew his lesson from his failure to achieve simplicity, unity, and strength of structure, in Lord Jim. What he may have learnt was this :

1. The analysis of a situation may be sufficient subject-matter for the short-story and yield adequate structure. It does not suffice however as the ground-work of a novel, even though it may be referred to a definite view-point. There must be a story in a good novel. Conrad had, as yet, himself been incapable of maintaining a story throughout his books, or of mastering his episodes in extent and grouping, so as to carry the story steadily forward. Being unable to render action for its own sake, -for entertainment achieved by dramatic effect-, this was vitally necessary for him.

2. Although a personal narrator may suffice for the short story, he will not do for a good novel. Marlow's

personal view-point does not even approximately give sufficient unity and coherence to the part of the book he relates. As long as Marlow stays outside the scene, he runs several risks :

- a) The length of his narrative involves a loss of verisimilitude,
- b) The comment interspersed in it makes us perpetually turn away from the scene and face the man in the foreground, to watch the effect it produces in him. This also stays the story.

Often enough Marlow does walk right into the scene, and he talks and acts, but then he exclusively serves as confessor and receiver of confidences. In that way these are made available to us without embarrassing the author. Whenever he appears, whether we listen to him or watch him, he delays the action. Thus Conrad disregards a vital rule of the craft of fiction, which P.S. Lubbock stresses strongly in his book :

Drama we want, always drama, for the central, essential paramount affair, whatever it is.

(The Craft of Fiction, p.139)

3. In the novel, the creation of atmosphere, -of strands and cross-references of symbolic meaning-, and the constant reflective concern with a central problem, cannot, in a satisfactory manner, take the place of the unity and coherence provided by a story.

4. The use of various methods, shift of view-point in time and place, endows the matter conveyed with richness, depth and complexity, as P.S. Lubbock holds :

In well-fashioned work it is always interesting to discover how method tends to be laid on method, so that we get, as it were, layers and stratifications in the treatment of story. (p.75)

d) The End of the Tether.

This is the last of Conrad's stories showing in abundance his typical shortcomings as to structure, although being fine in its vision. The cause is again the overstressing of his truth, the emphatically recurring explanation of certain facts of life as seen by him, which he wants to hammer into the reader. There is, in the story, sufficient evidence to prove the influence of Conrad's disastrous situation on its writing. He was materially at the end of his tether and was paid by the line. Therefore he was, as he was later to state in a letter, compelled to write many lines. We shall however only consider their value from the point of view of good fiction, although it is impossible that he had to bow <sup>to</sup> ~~through~~ necessity at the expense of his craft.

The whole story contains about two hundred pages. Long passages of description and reflection slow it down considerably. As in Almayer's Folly, Conrad starts off with a situation : Captain Whalley sitting in his deck-chair on the bridge of the steamer Nan-Shan, brooding over his past life. We remain in the present for a very short while and then turn to the past. Most of chapter I, chapters II-VI, -about fifty pages-, serve to render Whalley's past, with rare flashbacks to the present. Then we return to the present for about three pages, the ship still being at the same point. The next character is now brought in : Massy, first engineer, ship-owner and antagonist of Whalley. The latter had already, through his lengthy recollections, given us an occasional glimpse of Massy, but now we come to know him better through his own lengthy reflections with the usual casual references to the present. After Whalley's 'bringing in' had already taken about fifty pages,



Conrad returns to the present (chapter VIII) for about eight pages, most of which consist of a one-sided conversation between Massy and Whalley. It is continued for another twelve pages in chapter VIII. He then proceeds to the 'bringing in' of Massy and Sterne (chapter IX). We learn about the latter through their reflections, evolving lengthily in the past. There are four successive pages of conversation between Massy and Sterne and ten pages of reflections on the part of Massy. Not till chapter XII, -after 120 pages-, does the story proper start to get under way. Till then the action in the present had taken place on board the ship, which was just entering the estuary of the river, across a mud-bar, and steaming upstream for a few hours. The action in the past, consisting mainly of long incoherent passages of reflection, was strongly predominant. The action in the present, in comparison with it, was but a slender thread, consisting mainly of the detailed rendering of the taking of the ship across the mud-bar, of long conversations, and many pages of description of the way upstream. The action wears thin and takes but a few hours at night-fall. At arrival in Batu Beru, after 120 pages out of 200, the action does not however start to move. First Mr. Van Wyk, Whalley's friend, is introduced in the usual reflective manner. Long conversations with Whalley, recorded in Van Wyk's memory, follow. Not till chapter XIII, after 140 pages out of 200, does the story proper start to move, and we remain in the present. Even then it consists of only a long conversation Whalley-van Wyk, which, for an obvious reason, is opposed to those of the past. It contains the first climax of the story, Captain Whalley entrusting his awful secret to Mr. van Wyk. Only the first twenty pages of the last chapter contain real, swift-moving action.

Conrad's purpose in this 'grouping' is most evident, in his contrasting Mr. Van Wyk's past conversations with Whalley with the present one. After having lengthily expounded Whalley's convictions concerning Life, God and Man, he resumes them again in this conversation. Here we have his reflections about his past :

He was at home in life .. (p.191)

And the world is not bad. People had been very kind to him. (p.194)

Then we have the change of his convictions :

This necessity opened his eyes to the fundamental changes of the world. (p.197)

Departed the opportunities which he would have known how to seize. (p.198)

No ship - no home. (p.202)

His lofty ignorance of the treacherous backwash.. (p.205)

Forlorn traveller without a home, ... radically new view of existence. (p.206)

Loneliness, inward emptiness. (p.207)

The only credentials he could produce was the testimony of his whole life .. a unique document .. archaic curiosity .. screed traced in obsolete words .. (p.208)

The tranquil bearing of a man who had proved himself fit in every sort of way for the life of his choice (p.209)

Indispensable man (p.212)

Individuals were of some account then. There had been a time when men counted .. (p.216)

Pilgrim-like figure, wayfarer..

Men were not evil, after all .. only silly or unhappy (p.238)

No; there was not much real harm in men .. (p.239)

Captain Whalley strode forward to the rail; but his eyes, instead of going straight to the point, with the assured keen glance of a sailor, wandered irresolutely in space, as though he, the discoverer of new routes, had lost his way upon this narrow sea.

And all the time a shadow marched with him .. (p.240)  
presage of evil ..

The shadow which now goes with Whalley's convictions is Mr. Van Wyk's acrimonious reaction to his optimism.

The world had progressed since that time. Why, in knowledge of truth, in decency, in justice, in order - in honesty too, since men harmed each other mostly from ignorance. (p.318)

What men wanted, was to be checked by superior intelligence, by superior knowledge, by superior force too - yes, by force held in trust from God and sanctified by its use in accordance with His declared will. Captain Whalley believed a disposition for good existed in every man, even if the world were not a very happy place as a whole. (p.319)

They might be silly, wrongheaded, unhappy; but naturally evil -no. There was at bottom a complete harmlessness at least..  
'Is there?' Mr. Van Wyk snapped acrimoniously. Captain Whalley laughed at the interjection, in the good-humour of large, tolerating certitude. (p.320)

Like the image of the shadow, 'that marched slanting on his left hand', Van Wyk's attitude, like Decoud's in Nostromo, or the bitter outcry against some universal joke in earlier books, is of Conrad's making.

The time of course would have to come, and he trusted to his Maker to provide a manner of going out of which he need not be ashamed. (p.322)

Captain Whalley was gazing fixedly with a rapt expression as though he had seen his Creator's favorable decree written in mysterious characters on the wall. (p.323)

The striking dignity of manner could be nothing else.. but the expression of something essentially noble in the character... (p.321)

In all this, the looming disaster is forecast, and likewise in the predominant aspect of decay, disintegration and darkness of the surrounding matter which is evoked in many passages of description. It is most strongly anticipated in the ominous dimming of Whalley's eye-sight. He finds a most ignoble end, like an infernal joke on his spotless life and on his views, and also of Conrad's making. It is imminent in the last conversation with

Mr. Van Wyk, and the more threatening by its contrast to the foregone statements, making Conrad's point definitely clear.

You may have asked me what I had done with my conscience ... (p.332)

His deep voice came out, as though he had been overwhelmed by the earth in a landslide, and talking to you of the thoughts that haunt the dead in their graves. A cold shudder ran down Mr. Van Wyk's back.

'It seems to me that, like the blinded Samson, I would find the strength to shake down a temple upon my head .. What sin is there in loving your child? (p.333)

He had lived on without any help, human or divine. The very prayers stuck in his throat. He felt reluctant to look upon the sea or up to the sky. The hand of God was upon him, but it could not tear him away from his child. And, as if in a nightmare of humiliation.. every featureless man seemed an enemy.

'It is as if the light were ebbing out of the world. He 'appeared to Mr. Van Wyk .. as if, being deceived in the trust of his faith, .. he were beyond all the good and evil that can be wrought by the hands of men. (p.335)

The end, the only real action in the story, comes in a quick move like a long-expected thunderbolt.

He had nothing of his own - even his own past of honour, of truth, of just pride, was gone. All his spotless life had fallen into the abyss. (p.353)

This necessity of every moment brought home to Captain Whalley's heart the humiliation of his falsehood. He had drifted into it from paternal love, from incredulity, from boundless trust in divine justice meted out to men's feelings on this earth. He had caught at every hope. In the steadily darkening universe a sinister clearness fell upon his ideas. In the illuminating moments of suffering he saw life, men, all things, the whole earth with all her burden of created nature, as he had never seen them before.

Sometimes he was seized with a sudden vertigo and an overwhelming terror. (p.358)

The horror of incertitude had seized upon Captain Whalley, the miserable mistrust of men, of things - of the very earth.

The unusual had come, and he was not fit to deal with it. (p.363)

Whalley says to the diabolic Massy :

'There's a justice ...'

'You blind devil! It's you that drove me to it.'

Gone in this wreck .. Again he had a flash of insight. He was indeed at the end of his tether. (p.366)

God had not listened to his prayers. The light had finished ebbing out of the world; not a glimmer. It was a dark waste.

This is the same truth as in all the preceding novels and stories, -most strongly brought out in 'Heart of Darkness'-, the truth of Conrad's making, which, in many a reflective and descriptive passage, is, to the neglect of story and action, driven home to the reader. We have quoted these passages at length because we shall reconsider them regarding Conrad's vision.

According to their ignorance of his true motives as well as to their peculiar characters, Massy and Sterne naturally take a completely different view from that of Mr. Van Wyk as to Whalley's attitude. Mr. Van Wyk loathes Massy, who is depicted as a devil and thinks that 'there's generally something wrong somewhere' (p.257), attributing his own motives to Whalley : greed. Despite his detached pessimism, Van Wyk loathes Massy, and the mere thought of Sterne sickens him. Whalley is in the latter's way to promotion. 'There was in (his) rapid winking which went on all the time something quizzical, as though he had possessed the secret of some universal joke cheating all creation and impenetrable to other mortals'. He discovers the fact of Whalley's blindness some day and is immediately determined to take his chance and blow him up :



... the Incredible, the Inexplicable, the Unheard-of,  
the Mad'. (p.267)

It was repugnant to his imagination, shocking to his ideas of honesty, shocking to his conception of mankind. This enormity affected one's outlook on what was possible in the world : it was as if for instance the sun had turned blue, throwing a new and sinister light on men and nature. .. for a second the very colour of the sea seemed changed. (p.277)

.. it was an awestruck indignation at the reckless perversity of avarice (what else could it be?), at the mad and sombre resolution that for the sake of a few dollars more seemed to set at nought the common rule of conscience and pretended to struggle against the very decree of Providence.(p.281)

.. a fellow that, as it were, stood up against God Almighty Himself.

Sterne is ready to conjure up God Almighty as a witness for the purity of his base motives.

The words 'seem' and 'as it were' in the last two passages mitigate this judgment and give it a certain illusiveness. It is partly true, but not as meant by Sterne. Conrad's opinion is expressed through Van Wyk's attitude, who knows Whalley's true motives. What is indirectly stated through these different views is the fact that no man can know another man's true motives, the secret of his heart. As a rule, he identifies them with his own. Everybody has his own 'set of consciousness', and his own set of values, which is applied to everything, and is hopelessly at variance with the rest of mankind. Personal truth is, at best, of relative value. Whalley, Van Wyk, Sterne, Massy, the second engineer and the natives, all adapt their motives to their purposes, desires and necessities, and justify them accordingly, so that it is well-nigh impossible to know the truth, the true value of one's views. Conventional views do not offer any security against the terrible possibilities of

modern existence, against the 'unexpected'.

There is a third layer of views which confirms this clearly : that of the Malays :

His heart would be thumping with breathless awe of white men : the arbitrary and obstinate men who pursue inflexibly their incomprehensible purposes - beings with weird intonations in the voice, moved by unaccountable feelings, actuated by inscrutable motives. (p.249)

His destiny had been to thrive by the favour of various white men on the sea .. his placid mind had remained as incapable of penetrating the simplest motives of those he served as they themselves were incapable of detecting through the crust of the earth the secret nature of its heart, which may be fire or may be stone. (p.253)

His knowledge was absolute and precise; nevertheless, had he been asked his opinion, and especially if questioned in the downright, alarming manner of white men, he would have displayed the hesitation of ignorance. (p.252)

He was not troubled by an intellectual mistrust of his senses. If his captain chose to stir the mud it was well. He had known in his life white men indulge in outbreaks equally strange. He was only genuinely interested to see what would come of it. (p.253)

The selection of these passages shows that Conrad, was, beyond everything else, intent on conveying his truth, and sacrificed the necessities of his craft to that craving. Fiction is above all a matter to be shown. As soon as the author starts to explain he gives himself away. Conrad was capable of rendering his matter visually in an excellent manner, but he had at this point not yet learned the whole art of leaving things unwritten, -his matter in this case being especially good enough to speak for itself. As in 'The Return' he wants to preach his gospel, and the result is bad writing. We shall pick out one descriptive passage rich in symbolic meaning, and anticipating the imminent disaster

more intensely than any explanation could have done :

The ship had in that place to shave the bank so close that the gigantic wall of leaves came gliding like a shutter against the port; the darkness of the primeval forest seemed to flow into that bare cabin with the odour of rotting leaves of sodden soil - the strong muddy smell of the living earth steaming uncovered after the passing of a deluge. The bushes swished loudly alongside; above there was a series of crackling sounds, with a sharp rain of small broken branches falling on the bridge; a creeper with a great rustle snapped on the head of a boat davit, and a long, luxuriant green twig actually whipped in and out of the open port, leaving behind a few torn leaves that remained suddenly at rest on Mr. Massy's blanket. Then, the ship sheering out in the stream, the light began to return but did not augment beyond a subdued clearness; for the sun was very low already, and the river, wending its sinuous course through a multitude of secular trees as if at the bottom of a precipitous gorge, had been already invaded by a deepening gloom - the swift precursor of the night.

(p.292)

We need not explain what the call of the wilderness, stretching its arms into the ship, means; or the coming of the night. The leaves are left on the place where Mr. Massy is to brood out his fiendish plan.

Apart from the shortcomings shown above, this tale is again excellent for its visual quality. We have already mentioned the reflection of its general mood in the surrounding nature. The visual aspect is strongly emphasized by the fact that the whole of the story hinges on Captain Whalley's gradual blinding and losing his 'guiding stars', in a double sense. His senses prove just as unreliable as his mind. This aspect is further enhanced by the fact that Whalley, in the carrying out of his duty, has to rely on the unerring pair of eyes of his Malay serang. Yet he is deceived :

.. 'his peering eyes, set aslant in a face of the Chinese type, a little old face, immovable, as if carved in old brown oak, had informed him long before that the ship was not headed at the bar properly ...

The record of the visual world fell through his eyes upon his unspeculating mind as on a sensitised plate through the lens of a camera. His knowledge was absolute and precise ... He was certain of his facts.  
(p.252)

The serang is however completely incapable of perceiving anything beyond the surface meaning of things and facts.

There is an insistence on the use of instruments, - of the breakfast bell e.g., in connection with order in the captain's life-, or of the compass, as a symbol for the motives that lead man-. As little as the simple-minded Malay can perceive the force by which the needle is suddenly and abnormally distracted from its usual position, just as little can Whalley, having no true knowledge of the powers shaping life, see why he strays from his true path, until he grasps Massy's coat with the iron in its pockets. Then, in a flash of insight, he perceives his actual position on the sea and his moral one in life. On the other hand, this iron is the image of the greed in Massy, which causes disaster in this double sense, -actual and spiritual-. When the ship is nearly stranded on entering the river, the increase of danger is measured in incomprehensible Malay words by the shrill excited shouts of the leadsman, who announces the rapidly diminishing depth. Amidst the disaster, without any avail or purpose, the voice of the serang again pronounces distinctly : 'Eight fathom'. He may still think it some wise intention of the white man to destroy the ship. This is sufficient to show Conrad's steady progress in this aspect of his story-telling.



For the story that mainly serves to entertain and amuse the reader, a chronological sequence of events, leaving him completely in the dark as to the future and therefore commanding his full curiosity, may serve well enough. Conrad's interest did not lie in that direction. The surface-order of things hiding the coherence of meaning underlying them, they require for him a 'grouping', a constellation different from their ordinary life-like course. He also wants to convey facts and must do so, but he does it only in as far as they are significant for the meaning beyond them. 'Straight vision is bad form', he concedes to Garnett. In 'The End of the Tether' the arrangement of events, -the structure of the story-, is evidently determined by the meaning to be conveyed.

In his early work Conrad adapted the story completely to his purpose and practically destroyed its conventional form, to the neglect of its ordinary life-semblance. He composed a picture in single, more or less incoherent patches, shapeless but tempered in a uniformly gloomy colour. The patches, -episodes-, are different view-points, witnesses of the central action, their focus being the moral development and disintegration of the central character. He tries to show the motives of their acts, and traces their creeds and convictions, their hopes and expectations. Mostly, up to the Secret Agent, he starts his books from the back, -from the outcome of their action-, with a decisive situation in the life of the central character, and then works forward and backwards over the past. He disregards the chronological sequence and opposes the past to the present again and again, -a present which, for the bulk of the book-, is the future. In that way we are made aware of more than we could know if the incoherent past was a coherent present. Also our knowledge of the future



makes the course of events appear unavoidable. This advantage is however paid for by a serious shortcoming: our consciousness always being directed towards the future, we find it strenuous and difficult to keep thinking backwards. By this method Conrad forfeits the coherence of action as well as the precious quality of its movement: its drama. The feeling of paralyzing inertia, however, generated in us by this method, supports Conrad's consciously propagated view, that in the face of certain ultimate perdition all human endeavour is futile. The feeling that no amount of stubborn struggle will ever lead to reasonable achievement does not help to amuse us. Accompanying the hero on his way up from the past through all the stages of his deterioration, we already know his fate to be looming over him, ready to crush him. All his expectations and acts become tragically ridiculous and futile in the light of this sinister knowledge. With pitying eyes we watch his frantic efforts to evade his fate, knowing them to be foolish and but entangling him the more in his utter destruction. Ultimately it is their foolish trust in life, -as opposed to its monstrous unsafety-, which makes Conrad's heroes perish. At the same time however, the very futility of their efforts proves the strength of their spirit, pitched against the world's evil. This he undertakes to show. His method is evidently contrived to support what he consciously attempts to put over to us.

His purpose is quite evident in 'The End of the Tether', where Whalley's past beliefs are rendered repetitiously at the expense of action, and are contrasted with the present and future truth. The permanent contrast of a presumed reality with its truth forms a persistent layer of irony. We have first the hero's argument, then

life's argument (of Conrad's making) set against it, - the old method of thesis, antithesis, synthesis. The synthesis is provided at length by Conrad in the voluminous reflections of the hero on his downfall, 'the revelation of the sinister truth.' A statement in one of Conrad's letters, written towards the end of his life, clearly shows that he was aware of the respective value of 'explanation' and 'demonstration' through form in his craft :

I think that an author who tries to 'explain' is exposing himself to a very great risk - the risk of confessing himself a failure. For a work of art should speak for itself. Yet much could be said on the other side; for it is also clear that a work of art is not a logical demonstration carrying its intention on the face of it.

(To F.N. Doubleday, June 2nd, 1924, Aubry II, p.344)

There is in Conrad's letters sufficient proof of his own puzzlement and bewilderment at the spectacle he depicts, and often enough of his indignation. It is his paramount truth, that there is no safe truth except the one, that man cannot know truth, -the old Socratean paradox-. Most of Conrad's attempts at a representation of life, are therefore inconclusive in vision and structure alike. Those of his stories which offer a definite conclusion are best in both, like the one which we shall next consider. It is his right to choose the 'significant facts' in action and nature, to expound his truth. Nevertheless he must show it through image act and speech, and not explain it. As soon as he succeeds in doing this, and in bringing the different parts of his argument, thus shown, into coherence of time and place, and giving them the right proportion as seen from the whole, he will have found the way of true art.

By now, we have made it sufficiently clear, that Conrad's use (or neglect) of the story gave it a form completely different from that which it had hitherto known. This was due to his particular purpose of writing. Although he seems to ignore the problem of right and wrong and of good and evil, -never dealing with them explicitly-, a deeper understanding of his fiction makes it plain that the truth he was concerned with is of an essentially moral nature. His fiction was merely a vessel for conveying his convictions. The disregard of the conventional rules of his craft had resulted in a complete failure to achieve popularity. In order to secure a public for his writings, he had to establish a compromise between his urge to convey truth and the necessities of his craft. In the following, he succeeds in adapting the story, -the indispensable vessel for all the higher aspects of the novel-, to his purpose. He gives it an new shape according to his intentions, creating the peculiar Conradese story. His latent and paramount aim being the demonstration of a moral truth, the story has become for him a creative medium for a moral discovery.

Before proceeding to the consideration of the culminating point of Conrad's art we shall sum up the core of our argument. For the justification of our views we can turn to the best possible authority, -Conrad himself. Towards the end of his life he wrote :

The critic remarked that there was no difference in method or character between my fiction and my professedly autobiographical matter, as evidenced in the Personal Record. He concluded that my fiction was not historical of course but had an authentic quality of development and style which in its ultimate effect resembled historical perspective.

My own impression is that what he really meant was that my manner of telling, perfectly devoid of

familiarity as between author and reader, aimed essentially at the intimacy of a personal communication, without any thought for other effects. As a matter of fact, the thought for effects (truth) is there all the same (often at the cost of mere directness of narrative -neglect of the story-) and can be detected in my unconventional grouping and perspective, which are purely temperamental and wherein almost all my art consists. This I suspect, has been the difficulty the critics felt in classifying it as romantic or realistic. Whereas, as a matter of act, it is fluid, depending on grouping (sequence) with shifts, and on the changing lights giving varied effects of perspective.

It is in these matters gradually, but never completely, mastered that the history of my books really consists. Of course the plastic matter (selected subject matter) of this grouping and of those lights has its importance (suitability for moral concern) since without it the actuality of that grouping and that lighting could not be made evident, any more than Marconi's electric waves could be made evident without the sending-out and receiving instruments. In other words, without mankind (subject matter, audience) my art, an infinitesimal thing, could not exist.

(Conrad to a friend, to Richard Curle, 14th July, 1923, p.149)

So far, we have considered the history of Conrad's art in this sense and made the nature of his 'grouping and lighting' sufficiently clear. Their 'temperamental' origin is his particular quality of mind, whose typical form of expression is largely conditioned by his particular convictions and beliefs.

The singularity of Conrad's art was immediately recognized by the critics : (D.Chronicle: '... the like of which we have never read before'; Pall Mall Gazette : 'Mr.Conrad is in fact unique'; Spectator: (referring to Almayer's Folly) 'This is undoubtedly a powerful narrative of unusual character which opens a new field to the novel'. (Aubry I, p.201-) Conrad himself, above all in view of the long fatal lack of popularity, was

exceedingly aware of the singularity of his art.

He wrote to his friends :

.. all this does not help me much in making Mr. and Mrs. Verloc effective for the amusement of the public, -which won't be amused by me at all.

(To John Galsworthy, 17th June, 1907, Aubry II, p.53)

Of course it will not be on popular lines (Chance). Nothing of mine can be, I fear .. For I don't resemble anybody; and yet I'm not specialised enough to call up imitators as to matter or style. There is nothing in me but a turn of mind which, whether valuable or worthless, cannot be imitated.

(To J.B. Pinker, 30th July, 1907, Aubry II, p.54)

I suppose there is something in me that is unsympathetic to the general public, -because the novels of Hardy, for instance, are generally tragic enough and gloomily written too, -and yet they have sold in their time and are selling to the present day. Foreignness, I suppose.

(To John Galsworthy, 6th Jan., 1908, Aubry II, p.65)



## 5. The Final Stage of Apprenticeship.

Between Lord Jim and Nostromo, Conrad's greatest novel, he wrote but a few short stories. Nostromo is superb in its handling of method and technique. Its writing cost Conrad great efforts because he had to provide a coherent story for its greater part and had to do without a personal narrator. His greatest novels are told in this objective manner : Nostromo, The Secret Agent, Victory. Others are, to a certain extent, spoiled by the use of a personal narrator : Lord Jim, Under Western Eyes, Chance. Often he starts a book in the objective manner, and, finding it too great a strain to do without a personal narrator, takes refuge to Marlow.

After having finished 'The End of the Tether', Conrad was at an absolute loss concerning subject-matter as well as form of expression. For several years he was unable to produce anything noteworthy. In the writings of this time, having realised the flaws of his former works, he made efforts to achieve a compromise between what was congenial to him and what was necessary to achieve popularity. In 1901 and 1902 he collaborated with Ford Madox Hueffer in writing two books, -Romance and The Inheritors-. Both have the conventional qualities of structure and subject matter, and both were immediately more popular than Conrad's magnificent books, written before and after. Both have a simple coherent story with a simple outline. Hueffer was a facile inventor and could easily produce the necessary facts. During this time Conrad's views on fiction were consciously formulated. They are expounded in detail in Ford's book. He states that they had 'eternal technical discussions' (p.49), and that these, in keeping with Conrad's temperament, were 'intentionally unconventional':

For it became very early evident to us that what was the matter with the novel, and the British novel in particular, was that it went straightforward, whereas in your gradual making acquaintanceship with your fellows you never do go straightforward. (p.129)

You must first get him in (show character with strong impression), and then work backwards and forwards over his part ...

That theory at least we gradually evolved. (p.130)

We shall not consider at this point the question as to whether this method can be considered as optimal in fiction, or whether a shortcoming was being made a virtue. Strangely enough, Ford gives ample proof that they considered a good story as the first premise of the author, and that the technique of shift of time and view-point should not stand in the way of the story. We cannot easily conceive how it is possible to work backwards and forwards over the part of the characters without doing serious harm to the story.

We thought just simply of the reader. Will this word make him pause and so slow down the story? If there is any danger of that, away with it. That is all that is meant by the dangerous word technique. (p.173)

Ford certainly is simplifying again in this statement, but he continues :

In writing a story we agreed that every word set on paper - every word set on paper - must carry the story forward and, as the story progressed, the story must be carried forward faster and faster and with more and more intensity. (p.210)

These certainly are laudable intentions, requiring most of what was not yet to be found in Conrad's tales.

For there are times when the paraphernalia of indirect speech, interruptions and the rest retard your action too much. Then they must go : the sense of reality must stand down before the necessity to get on. (p.191)

.. the object of the novelist is to keep the reader entirely oblivious of the fact that the author exists, ... the author must suppress himself .. the story is everything.

(p.186)

All this sounds remarkably like Trollope's views on the absolute priority of the story in a novel. Yet in practice their writing so far was completely different. Ford continues :

We agreed that the general effect of a novel must be the general effect that life makes on mankind. Life does not narrate but gives impressions on the brain. The author must not narrate, but render impressions.

(p.180)

Certainly a theory of fiction is not one of painting. We may infer that the stress laid on the story certainly results from Conrad's failure to base his novels on simple and coherent action, which would have carried the heavy burden of the other aspects of his fiction. In the following, we shall see that this theory, as far as the story is concerned, remained but wishful thinking. In his next novel, Nostromo, Conrad succeeded in finding a compromise between his temperamental method, -his 'unconventional manner of grouping and lighting', -shift of time and perspective-, and the necessity of a coherent pattern of action. Nostromo is his most imposing work, and, -from the point of view of structure as well as from other aspects-, his greatest. Its writing however cost him a tremendous effort. With the exception of the Secret Agent, and maybe Victory, it remained, as far as masterly use of methods is concerned, a solitary achievement. In Chance, he again took refuge in Marlow. We shall not, at this point, try to examine to what extent the stress laid on the story in the common theory of Ford and Conrad is compatible with the demand, that the author should not 'narrate', but only render impressions'. The incongruity of the views expressed turns

out clearly in a controversy between Conrad and Ford, about Conrad's Personal Record. In 1909, Ford had founded a review, -the English Review-, and Conrad had contributed a short autobiography, under the title 'Some Reminiscences'. Conrad took their common propositions in a literal sense and 'worked backwards and forwards' over his own past, as he himself was the central figure of that book. This he did in his usual manner which, according to his own admission, is not essentially different from his autobiographical writing. The result was, that the story was torn to pieces, and Ford protested against the 'ragged condition' of the book. Conrad defended his contribution hotly on several occasions. and replied to Ford :

But as writing to a man with a fine sense of form and a complete understanding, for years, of the way in which my literary intentions work themselves out, I ~~wish~~ to protest against the words - Ragged condition. It is so little ragged to my feeling, and in point of literary fact ...

(Aubry II, 31st July, 1909, p.100)

A comparison of the Congo Diary with 'Heart of Darkness' proves that Conrad did in fact, when using his own past for his fiction, keep very close to his experience. Through his reminiscence he reproduced life as it had presented itself to him without fundamental changes.

In the Personal Record and The Mirror of the Sea, Conrad renders his own past and indulges in his temperamental manner to excess. He himself calls this manner of writing 'discursive'. Referring to the Personal Record he wrote to E.V. Lucas :

I know that the form is unconventional, but it is not so unusual as it seems. It has been thought out. I hope still that from that unmethodical narrative a personality can be made to emerge in a sufficiently interesting manner.

(23rd June, 1909, p.100, Aubry II)



Referring to the same book, he wrote to the reader of Doubleday & Doran, Alfred A. Knopf; 'Truly it is the very heart and essence of Conrad' (24th Aug., 1913, Aubry II, p.150). Both books contain bits of superb description and parts which, with their excellent daylight vision, could make excellent stories.

(The chapter 'Tremolino' e.g. was incorporated in 'The Arrow of Gold', which is inferior to the first version, and the rendering of Conrad's meeting with Almayer is more real than the whole book). Both however have no coherent pattern of action at all, thus giving a rather fragmentary impression. In a Personal Record, Conrad renders his past in connection with the period of the writing of Almayer's Folly. The negligible action on the present level is interspersed with episodes of his past which seem scattered at random, without any sequence of time or regard to unity of place or action. The writing of Almayer's Folly as a 'leitmotiv', to knit the whole book together, is completely ineffective. Conrad's persistent running comment on various aspects of the craft of fiction and on life, -the same combination as can be found in the Mirror-, increases the impression of incoherence, the fragmentary threads of action being completely dropped at times, for the sake of his comment. They do not make for the unity of the book at all. Conrad, in A Personal Record, gradually works backwards into his past, up to remote ancestors, then returns to the present again by devious ways, having done so occasionally throughout the book. When Conrad, arguing against Ford's reproach, says that the book (see ref. above) 'expresses perfectly his purpose of treating the literary life and the sea life on parallel lines, with a running reference to his early years', he may be stating the truth, but has not considered the damaging effect of the running comment



on the structure of the book. He has also failed to take into account the fact, that the reader cannot know Conrad's past as well as he himself, and cannot either on the first, or on the second reading, establish a coherence between all those scattered episodes. The ordinary reader is not used to establishing contexts on three levels at the same time. Both books are typical of Conrad's manner of presenting a negligible and constantly interrupted line of action in the present, whilst rendering the bulk of action in retrospect, by working backwards and forwards over it, and interspersing a running commentary in addition. All this cannot make for a good story, but must destroy it.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE MASTER OF FICTION.

##### 1) Typhoon.

The development from predominant analysis to prevalent outside-rendering of the characters, -to their delineation in looks, behaviour, speech, suggestive gestures, habits and remarks-, had begun in Almayer's Folly, in the opposition Almayer-Babalatchi, and has now reached its peak. Conrad has not entirely abandoned his inclination for analysis of mind. It is however now a mere supplement to his outside-rendering which is masterly by his capacity of keen observation and exact rendering. The first phrase of Typhoon is : 'Captain MacWhirr , (the hero of the story) .. had a physiognomy that, in the order of material appearances, was the exact counterpart of his mind'.

In 'Typhoon' Conrad has succeeded in attaining a perfect compromise between his technique of 'lighting and grouping' -his habit of throwing light from different, defined angles of vision (secondary characters), onto the central character, in order to extract his essence-, and the requirements of the story, -coherent, chronological action-. Description and evocation of atmosphere are not overstressed, however intense their impact may be; they do not check the story but are integral parts lending utmost precision to facts and, at the same time, helping to carry the story on.

However gloomy, the atmosphere is not stagnant and inert, but full of turmoil and violent motion. Conrad has now attained the capacity of rendering swift dramatic action, -seen at best in the struggle between the crew and the coolies in the foredeck-. All this makes the story an outstanding achievement, the more so since there are no loose ends left. The end is definite and conclusive in form and content. This is rare for Conrad, in as far as it is a 'happy end', showing the victory of human resolution and action over the terrible onslaught of the elements, rather than a surrender of will after a struggle of the soul.

In structure movement and mood the story is of one cast. It perfectly answers all Trollope's rules as to the good story. Furthermore, it contains an aspect beyond Trollope's reach. Although given in terms of great factual precision, the compactness of the story is tremendously increased by a dense mesh of rich symbolic meaning, conveyed entirely through action and facts. Intensity of vision and compactness of structure are intrinsically connected and equal each other, -the genius of the artist finds perfect expression through the adequate skill of the craftsman-. The definite finish of structure goes hand in hand with a clear cut conclusion of meaning. The story has all the criteria of true art.

When writing 'Typhoon' Conrad had just finished 'The End of the Tether'. The kernel of the story was but a 'mere anecdote ..., a bit of sea yarn' which he 'had heard being talked about in the East' :

I felt that to bring out its deeper significance which was quite apparent to me, something other, something more was required; a leading motive that would harmonize all those violent noises, and a point of view, that would put all that elemental fury into

its proper place. What was needed of course was Captain MacWhirr... He is the product of twenty years of life. My own life. - Both the Typhoon and Captain MacWhirr presented themselves to me as the necessities of the deep conviction with which I approached the subject of the story'.

What this conviction was we shall explain later.

The mind of Captain MacWhirr, like his physiognomy, 'had no pronounced characteristics whatever; it was simply ordinary, irresponsive, and unruffled, .. a mind much too simple to be perplexed by anything in the world except men's idle talk for which it was not adapted'.  
(p.133)

He had 'just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more', and therefore 'he was tranquilly sure of himself'. 'It was, in truth, as impossible for him to take a flight of fancy as it would be for a watchmaker to put together a chronometer with nothing except a two-pound-hammer and a whip-saw in the way of tools'.  
(p.134)

He is 'entirely given to the actuality of the bare existence... .. In his letters could be found sentences like this : The heat here is very great'; 'On Christmas Day at 4 p.m. we fell in with some icebergs'.

This means that his acts and behavior are entirely determined by the surface of the facts surrounding him. It never occurs to him that they may be mere signs of something beyond them. When one day he perceives a fall of the barometer that 'was of a nature ominously prophetic, ... he betrays no sort of inward disturbance'. The worst he had known till then were gales in the nature of 'dirty weather', and he could conceive nothing beyond that never having come across it; 'omens were nothing to him, and he was unable to discover the message of a prophecy till the fulfilment had brought it home to his very door'. There is a lot of trash to be found in books - people talking about things they never have known themselves - how can a captain say e.g. he has shirked a typhoon when he has never met it, swerving from its path. The 'past to his mind is done with, and the future not there yet'. He is 'neither loquacious nor taciturn'. 'There were matters of duty

of course', but past and future not existing for him, 'the more general actualities of the day required no comment - because facts can speak for themselves with overwhelming precision'. He 'can't understand what people can find to talk about .. must be saying the same things over and over again'. His utter lack of imagination beyond the perception of facts is elucidated by the example of the Siamese flag-elephant, or his bewildered consternation at Jukes' 'wild' figurative speech . It is summed up in Jukes' statement at the end of the story : 'He's so jolly innocent that if you were to put your thumb to your nose and wave your fingers at him he would only wonder gravely to himself what you got into', not noticing that he was being jeered at. He 'wandered innocently over the waters with the only visible purposes of getting food, raiment, and house-room for three people ashore'. All this means that, given entirely to the facts of bare existence, living merely to exist and help others to exist, MacWhirr is utterly incapable of perceiving anything of a spiritual order under the surface of human life and of becoming aware of the powers that shape it.

He 'had sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it may contain of perfidy of violence, and of terror'.

And yet there is something mysterious about him, like the impulse that urged him to run away from home to sea when he was a boy, - the capacity of doing unthinkingly the right thing at the right moment in a simple manner, and thus to withstand the fiercest attacks of the powers surrounding him, - the very thing which men with subtle minds lack. 'The sea or destiny' with its utmost fury cannot wring the least sign of fear from him, except the few words : 'I should not like to lose her'. To the very last moment he thinks of his duty.



Captain MacWhirr's mind obviously does not offer great opportunities for analysis, and for the rest Conrad does not know what is going on in his mind, it being the exact opposite of his own. He thus provides a natural check for Conrad's unholy inclination to indulge at length in reflections.

Throughout the story Conrad keeps several cameras aimed on MacWhirr from different angles, so to speak. First, his young first mate Jukes is opposed to him, who 'out of the fullness of his heart and the liveliness of his fancy' keeps writing letters to a 'chum' in a boat in the Atlantic, making fun of 'his old man'. When the fury of the sea is unchained however, he clings desperately to him and without him would be swept away. He strongly resembles earlier young heroes of Conrad. He is the exact counterpart of MacWhirr and by his flourishing fancy brings out to the full the latter's irresponsiveness and lack of imagination. Jukes has a subtle, intelligent and imaginative mind, and therefore he is 'always meeting trouble half-way', as MacWhirr puts it.

The second character to throw light on MacWhirr by his attitude and his letters to his wife, is Salomon Rout, an experienced old first engineer. MacWhirr himself writes letters to his wife which, due to his complete lack of suspicion, can be read over by his steward, and thus communicated to the reader. By showing the reaction which all these letters create in different places and persons, Conrad throws the character of MacWhirr further into relief. Moreover, he connects the lonely struggle of ship and men with the rest of the world. The hazard and danger of their life is made intensely real by its opposition to the peace and safety of life in drawing-rooms, which is only made possible through this fierce struggle. Of this fact, those who profit from it are lucidly unaware. 'Faithful to facts, which alone his consciousness reflected', MacWhirr 'would set them down with painstaking care in his letters', like making entries in a log-book, not betraying the

terror they contain. All these letters, conveying Conrad's indirect comment on the spectacle depicted and on the person of MacWhirr, and at the same time serving to define the character of those writing them and receiving them, fall in naturally with the pace of the story. It is Conrad's 'grouping and lighting' in perfect accordance with good story-telling.

The story resembles a drama. In composition, it consists of six chapters, the last one being but a brief afterlude. It contains an exposition, a climax, -in the passing into the centre of the typhoon and the quelling of the uproar of the celestials-, a retarding moment, -in the run through the lull in the dead centre of the typhoon-, an anti-climax, -in the passing out of it-, which is however merely anticipated and then passed over. Then comes the definite conclusion. The masterly trick of enlightening letters is used from the very beginning and continues throughout the story as a sort of casual, well-fitting reference for clearing up the situation, and carrying the story onward at the same time. Passages from letters conclude the story, showing the varying effects of the typhoon on the different minds. Jukes' letter passes final judgment on MacWhirr.

Chapter I contains an exposition, -the setting of the scene and the presentation of the characters-. In 'Almayer's Folly' and 'The End of the Tether', this had taken more than half of the book, in the form of unravelling the present situation from the past-. In 'Typhoon' it takes 12 pages out of seventy - about one fifth of the whole-. As in 'Almayer's Folly' he starts with a situation and explains it from the past whilst bringing in the characters casually and adroitly and defining the angle in which they shall view the captain. After chapter I the story immediately gets under way.

There is a unity of place, action, and time. The scene is the ship Nan-Shan, the action its struggle against the typhoon on the trip to Fuchau, which takes about one day.

Circumstances of action, place and time are rendered with utmost precision, visually and audibly. The story proper starts off one morning and we learn that the sun is out, what the sky is like, the swell of the sea, the wind, and its direction and strength, the temperature, the general state of the atmosphere, the course of the ship and the points she may have to sheer off to avoid the typhoon. Throughout the story Conrad is constantly registering the changes in all these components of the ship's surroundings, showing the development of the typhoon and the different phases of the struggle against it - the coming of darkness, the changes of the stars, the coming of clouds, the increase of the winds and of the fury of the sea, the height and the strength of the waves, the increase of sound and the vanishing of the human voices in the general uproar, and the complete loss of sight in absolute darkness. All these changes are registered by the ship's movements, <sup>by</sup> the men on the bridge - through their senses and instruments -, and are met by the common action of the crew, in the handling of instruments and engine, to meet the exactly timed phases of the typhoon. Jukes makes an entry in the log-book before its first climax, at 8 p.m.; the captain notices the wheel-house-clock on the climax, at 1.30 a.m. The ominous fall of the barometer is repeatedly mentioned. In the absolute darkness of the unleashed fury of the waters and winds, only the assuring light of the instruments in the wheelhouse remains in front of the man who steers; the 'binnacle made a shiny oval of light in a thin white fog', the 'wheel-house-clock ... had a white face on which the black hands appeared to stand quite still. The speaking tube connects the upper world, full of darkness, with the engine-room which is full of light, revealing the powerful motions of the shiny metallic limbs of the engine. Jukes gets a glimpse of it in the decisive stage of the struggle : of the frantic efforts of the stokers in front of the fiery glow of the boilers, of the work of the mighty limbs of the engine, controlled by the signals of the

telegraph with its meaningful inscriptions and its restless hand, of the controlling function of steam-gauge and water-gauge, and of the hectic efforts of the engineers to keep all this smooth functioning intact. This rendering of precise visual and audible detail -serving but the meaning of the story, and developed at length in the preceding stories-, is a unique achievement. Like the footprint of the savage in Robinson Crusoe it gives intense reality to the story, but in 'Typhoon' it gains fullest value by the fact that Conrad conveys his conviction, -the underlying meaning-, entirely and exclusively through the nature of these facts. Lengthy and delaying description and reflection are abandoned. The story is perfect in its own right, and at the same time is, in its colour and shape, a vessel for the underlying truth. His conviction, -his truth-, is exclusively shown. It is visible and audible in the surrounding matter and is personified in the characters. It is shaped and formed life, an integral part of the story, and no longer separate, abstract reflection. Description and reflection are no longer disproportionate episodes but fall naturally into the pace of the story.

The impression of paralysis and inertia which was strong in Conrad's early work, is not only overcome by masterly composition, but also by mastery of language. Conrad seems to have applied a radical cure to his heavy epithetic style . Economy, compactness, and unity of structure are equalled in the style of the language used in 'Typhoon'. They are the creative outcome of one mind; and in true art must show the same qualities. As the structure dramatizes the whole course of the story, so its style the single parts. Both have become apt servants of his vision. Conrad was of course partly compelled to use this style by the nature of his hero, but that may have



been a conscious trick. His power of writing has tremendously increased in every respect.

The means of expression 'par excellence' in drama are act and speech. As we have seen, the element of action is strong. There is more speech, -not reflective, but terse, matter-of-fact-statements in the manner of MacWhirr-, in this story than in any previous one. On the pitch of dramatic action, Jukes, too weak to resist the violent blows of the typhoon, clings desperately, in utter darkness, to the body of his captain. Like their ship, they are swayed and rocked and toyed with by vicious forces, violent beyond any imagination, and have to face destruction any moment. Shouting in each other's ears, the words are torn from their mouths by the winds and lost in the general din. Single parts of phrases can be heard as from infinite distances, mere snatches of speech, but still victorious over the utmost wrath of nature.

Conrad is no longer loquacious about his truth. He gives its underlying meaning through images, metaphors, symbols, allegories and comparisons, often as a sort of afterthought. The heavy, lengthy epithets have almost completely gone. The phrases are short as a rule, and very much to the point. Not only Jukes and MacWhirr have this concise manner of speech, but also taciturn old Rout, and the second mate, who 'was concise in his speech to the point of rudeness'.

We shall pick out some passages at random to show that new style :

Captain MacWhirr, unprepared, took a run and brought himself up with a jerk by an awning stanchion.

'A profane man', he said, obstinately. 'If this goes on, I'll have to get rid of him the first chance'.

'It's the heat', said Jukes. 'The weather's awful.'



It would make a saint swear. Even up here I feel exactly as if I had my head tied up in a blanket'.

Captain MacWhirr looked up. 'D'ye mean to say, Mr. Jukes you ever had your head tied up in a blanket? What was that for?'

'It's a manner of speaking, sir,' said Jukes, stolidly.

'Some of you fellows do go on! What's that about saints swearing? I wish you wouldn't talk so wild. What sort of saint would that be that would swear? No more saint than yourself, I expect. And what's a blanket got to do with it - or the weather either ..The heat does not make me swear - does it? It's filthy bad temper. That's what it is. And what's the good of your talking like this?'

Thus Captain MacWhirr expostulated against the use of images in speech, and at the end electrified Jukes by a contemptuous snort, followed by words of passion and resentment : 'Damme, I'll fire him out of the ship if he doesn't look out'.

This was one of the longest speeches Jukes had ever heard of him. And Jukes, incorrigible, thought : 'Goodness me! Somebody's put a new inside to my old man.

Here's temper, if you like. Of course it's the weather; what else? It would make an angel quarrelsome - let alone a saint'.

(p.148)

MacWhirr's mind does not offer many occasions for analysis, he takes nothing but facts and acts into account and has a terse manner of speaking, thus offering a check, an outside help, against Conrad's deficiencies. In the descriptive passages Conrad's style has equally tightened :  
(I separate the phrases to show their length)

'Come on like this,' shouted Jukes, 'five minutes ago .. all of a sudden.'

The head disappeared with a bang, and a heavy splash and patter of drops swept past the closed door as if a pailful of melted lead had been flung against the house.

A whistling could be heard now upon the deep vibrating noise outside.

The stuffy chartroom seemed as full of draughts as a shed. Captain MacWhirr collared the other sea-boot on its passage along the floor.

He was not flustered, but he could not find at once the opening for inserting his foot.

The shoes he had flung off were scurrying from end to end

of the cabin, gambolling playfully over each other like puppies.

As soon as he had stood up he kicked at them viciously, but without effect.

He threw himself into the attitude of a lunging fencer, to reach after his oilskin coat;

and afterwards he staggered all over the confined space while he jerked himself into it.

Very grave, straddling his legs far apart, and stretching his neck, he started to tie ...'

(p.157)

As a rule the phrases are short, simple in structure, and start with the subject. They contain simple statements that are added to each other in the manner of an enumeration. The epithets that made his style heavy and static have almost completely gone. There are very few adjectives. The verb, the word denoting activity, predominates; the scarce epithets are mostly forms of the verb (closed, melted, vibrating, lunging, confined); even the nouns used often denote motion (bang, splash, patter, drops, pailful, whistling, noise). All this gives a completely new rhythm to Conrad's language. The simple enumeration and joining of statements, full of words of action and motion, endows it with a dynamic quality. At times it conveys a sense of headlong forward rush, of restlessness, of breathless excitement. Even in occasional long phrases this quality of dynamic movement is there :

It was tumultuous and very loud - made up of the rush of the wind, the washes of the sea, with that prolonged deep vibration of the air, like the roll of an immense and remote drum beating the charge of the gale.

As soon as he attempted to open the door the wind caught it.

Clinging to the handle, he was dragged out over the door-step, and at once found himself engaged with the wind in a sort of personal scuffle whose object was the shutting of that door.

(p.157)

All this is essentially seen and heard and full of movement. The beating of drums in the darkness had accom-

panied the climax in 'Heart of Darkness', but now Conrad does not yield to the temptation of spreading himself out in long comments. The beats and vibrations of the atmosphere are felt in the very pulse of his language, -he has truly caught life in its form and movement and colour :

When the rumbling ceased it seemed to him that there was a pause of every sound, a dead pause (the heart of the typhoon) in which Captain MacWhirr's voice rang out startlingly.

'What's that? A puff of wind? -it spoke much louder than Jukes had ever heard it before - 'On the bow. That's right. She may come out of it yet.'

The mutter of the winds drew near apace. In the forefront could be distinguished a drowsy waking plaint passing on, and far off the growth of a multiple clamour marching and expanding. There was a throb as of many drums in it, a vicious rushing note, and like the chant of a tramping multitude.

Jukes could no longer see his Captain distinctly. The darkness was absolutely piling itself upon the ship. At most he made out movements, a hint of elbows spread out, of a head thrown up.

(p.195)

All this is splendidly dramatic and intensely real. Conrad has disappeared behind his matter, although he always remains himself. His disconcerting twist of vision has almost gone. He has now come completely into his own, and has developed his gift to perfection without giving up his idiosyncracies, in either vision or form.

## 2. NOSTROMO

In this novel Conrad fully displays his newly gained mastery of 'grouping and lighting', as adapted to the rules of good story-telling, and with greatest gain. To judge from the preface of the book, and from Conrad's contemporary letters, its writing cost him a colossal effort. 'For twenty months, he struggled with the Lord, in complete seclusion, for its creation; and after its completion he rose from his desk as a man who had been buried in a grave. When starting it, it seemed to him 'that there was nothing in the world to write about', and, since his memories of the sea and of the East were exhausted for the moment, he took the decisive step away from that subject-matter. Although he still remained on the sea-board, and the central hero is still cast in the mould of his first sailor-friend, there is a vast range of new subject-matter and a great variety of characters. Few of them however are connected with the sea. He had to create the country of Sulaco entirely from his imagination, and, although it cost him a tremendous effort, he had the reward of a material that was fertile for his truth and pliable to his intentions. Apart from the Secret Agent, he was not to achieve such perfection again, in the complete balance of his intentions with the requirements of good art. Nostromo was to become his greatest novel and one of the greatest in English fiction. It is a victory in his congenial manner. He does not have a favorable sea-setting nor a conclusive vision, and yet the action is mastered. It closes in a complete circle where beginning and end fall together so to speak.

Conrad however was not yet satisfied with his achievement. On the occasion of the translation of Nostromo into French he wrote to his friends, exposing his typical anxieties as to his craft :

Ne pensez-vous pas que l'on pourrait raccourcir un peu ce long livre? Pas ôter des épisodes de l'action elle-même, -non! mais je veux dire enlever les mots superflus. Il y a dans ce colume trop de phrases. Phrases d'analyse, phrases descriptives aussi.

(A Joseph de Smet, Nov.26, 1911, p.110)

Je lui (J.de Smet) propose de faire moi-même quelques coupures dans Nostromo. Il y a des phrases superflues dans ce gros livre. Oui! Il y en a. Hélas! Tel paragraphe, tel passage d'analyse ne perdrait rien à avoir une phrase en deux enlevée... C'est long - cette machine. Et un peu lent aussi.

(A A.H.D. Davray, Dec.1911, p.111)

C'était un four noir, vous savez. Moi j'ai une espèce de tendresse pour cette énorme machine. Mais elle ne marche pas; c'est vrai. Il y a quelque-chose qui empêche. Je ne sais pas quoi. De reste, avec toute ma tendresse, moi-même je ne peux pas en supporter la lecture.

(A André Gide, Juin 21, 1912, p.120)

Another letter to A.H.D. Davray gives testimony of the creative agony the book cost him :

... une stupeur de l'esprit, un invincible dégoût de la plume, une terreur de l'encrier, mon cher, come si c'était un trou noir et sans fond où on pourrait se noyer.

La solitude me gagne; elle m'absorbe. Je ne vois rien, je ne lis rien. C'est comme une espèce de tombe, qui serait en même temps un enfer, où il faut écrire, écrire, écrire. On se demande si cela vaut la peine, -car enfin on n'est jamais satisfait et on n'a jamais fini.

Lasziate ogni speranza vous qui, par amour et par haine, chercher à donner un corps à quelques ombres sans conséquence.

(Lettres Françaises, 22 Aout, 1903, p.50)



In Nostromo, Conrad is set on dealing with some aspects of modern society and its development as reflected in the hearts of a handful of men and women. His story is subjected to this psychological and social interest. In the preface to the book Richard Curle writes :

But let us not forget that atmosphere and characterisation alone do not constitute a great novel : it must tell a story, an absorbing story, in which the two other ingredients play their part to form a rounded unity, even if that story bears little resemblance to what is conventionally accepted as a plot. And, of course, Nostromo does tell a story : indeed, it tells several stories ... there are various interweaving threads and themes, and above all there is the feeling of harmony and 'rightness'. Conrad ... knew how to write dramatically as few men have known.  
(p.IX)

This is apparently an overstatement, and Curle talks his way around something about which he was not quite at ease. The word 'harmony' would seem to indicate that the narrative is held together by something other than straightforward action, and the word 'rightness' that this is done in a satisfactory way. Curle informs us first that Nostromo :

... as a book aroused little enthusiasm partly perhaps because people had come to expect of its author Eastern settings and exotic seas, and as a serial it provoked numerous bewildered and indignant protests from readers who, in Conrad's words 'wrote many letters complaining of so much space being taken by utterly unreadable stuff'. Later on he continues, showing the same uneasiness as already pointed out :

I cited, as feasible cause of Nostromo's initial success, its alien setting, but I might add to that its involved method of narration, devised for specific reasons which ultimately heighten the effect.  
(p.VIII)

Evidently this 'involved method' did not heighten the effect for those readers. Maybe it was only that they did not look for such effects as were to be heightened, -if merely looking for an entertaining story they would of course be disappointed. It is very difficult if not impossible to remember Nostromo as a coherent unity of action. The action is split up inbever so many scraps and subordinated to a point of view beyond it. For Conrad himself 'the episode' on which the book is based was 'nothing to speak of.. I did not see anything at first in the mere story.. To invent a circumstantial account<sup>of the</sup> robbery did not appeal to me... It was only when it dawned upon me that the purloiner of the treasure ... could be even a man of character ... that I had the first vision. From that moment ... it had to be' (p.XIX)  
It is the plot and the characters which interest Conrad.

The main story is subjected to the psychological interest. The whole book hinges on a crucial point, -the moment of Nostromo's 'moral ruin' (p.XXIII) under the pressure of the silver. We are aware of this impending fact from the beginning, -the tale of the two gringos anticipates it-. All the rest of the book shows why that had to be, why it was inevitable, and only then how it happened. There is no coherent development of action but patches collected from different times and places, which elucidate the substance and development of the character at the core. That is the something which 'deters' in the book, -what keeps it from moving and makes it heavy.

The excellence of Conrad's achievement in Nostromo can be measured by the complete disappearance

of his innocuous habit of too lavishly describing his settings for the sake of creating 'atmosphere'. The setting of Nostromo is created with extreme economy and yet it is superbly impressive. Every stone, every tree, every cloud mentioned, the winds, the little harbours outside Sulaco, the villages, every corner of the town, all play an important part in the course of the action, and not only once but several times. Apart from their merely factual description, they form, as nature ever does in Conrad, a spiritual setting. Higuerota and the Cordillera, with its pure white snows, is the image of remote and pure ideals or even of God. Its shadows are lying over the land, but mostly it is hidden from sight in clouds. Sunset sings 'magnificent and inaudible strains of inspired music' (p.40) on its snowy flanks, illuminating its unstained purity. It is inaccessible for mortals. At the foot of the mountain lies the 'Campo', the 'great land of plains and mountains and people, suffering and mute, waiting for the future in a pathetic immobility of patience' (p.88), -where 'lonely figures are carrying loads on the roads, toiling under great strawhats.' (p.89) The focal point is Sulaco with the Golfo Placido, overlooked by the mine on the mountainside, with lights blinking at night where there had been the 'very Paradise of snakes'. The Golfo is like a temple of peace in the light of the day, but it is hell in the night, when the clouds of Higuerota cover it with a 'true night of the gulf, too dense for the eye of God and the wiles of the devil' (p.543). It is inaccessible for the great winds of the sea, which could blow away the stifling and stagnant heat at its heart : an adequate setting for the great downfall. In its centre there are the two barren islands. The description of the little ravine and the streak of green on the one seems

but an insignificant patch of setting at first. Later however it becomes the main scene, -the place where the object of the moral ruin is hidden, where a faithless man and the hero find their end. On the same spot, in the heart of the dark gulf, the lighthouse is erected, with its refracting apparatus in the image of its keeper, Linda; 'Its brass rings and rings of prisms glittered and sparkled like a dome-shaped shrine of diamonds, containing not a lamp but some sacred flame, dominating the sea' (p.552). It is an image of a precious and indestructible faith, a guiding light for men and ships in the heart of the darkness, and is cast off by Nostromo for the sake of something slight.

Finally, there is in those few pages of description, of which every word is necessary, the seemingly chance evocation of an old tale of 'impious gringos', in connection with the promontory of Azuera :

The poor, associating by an obscure instinct of consolation the ideas of evil and wealth, will tell you that it is deadly (Azuera) because of its forbidden treasures. (pp.4-5)

The two gringos, spectral and alive, are believed to be dwelling to this day amongst the rocks, under the fatal spell of their success. Their souls cannot tear themselves away from their bodies mounting guard over the discovered treasure. They are now rich and hungry and thirsty -a strange theory of tenacious gringo ghosts suffering in their starved and parched flesh of defiant heretics, where a Christian would have renounced and been released. (p.5)

Here is the plot, to which the action had to be stretched. The main spiritual and moral portent of the book is compressed and anticipated in this tale, just as the circle of action is closed by the anticipation of its climax. The little word 'impious' alone becomes of terrible significance for the despairing Nostromo, when he dis-

covers on his return from his errand that his Padrona has died without the consolation of a confession, and he believes her soul lost, 'cursing the impiety of his refusal'. The knowledge of this tale is an essential agent influencing his decision at the climax of his disaster and leading him to despair. He uses the same terms for the 'silver that is blighted by a curse' as are used for the tale, and believes himself lost because of the superstitious belief in its truth.

Finally there is, as part of the setting, the advent of the railway, the building of the silver-mine, and the fleet of steamers with their names of mythological significance, penetrating into the peace of the Golfo Placido which had been inaccessible for sailing-ships. The land and the town, like the men in it, show the scars and ruins of a dark and savage, though noble, past. Its face is changed by the advent of these forerunners of modern times, just as the faces and the appearance of its people change. This is shown in casual phrases : 'El Senor Administrador - older, harder, mysteriously silent, with the lines deepened on his English, ruddy out-of-doors complexion' (p.112). Land and people are seen from a long past of suffering, expressed in the outcry of Gould's father who died in despair :

God looked wrathfully at these countries, or else  
He would let some ray of hope fall through a rift  
in the appalling darkness of intrigue, bloodshed and  
crime that hung over the Queen of Continents'.(pp.83-84)

The little town of Sulaco allows, -in the same way as the ship isolated on the sea-, for a concentration of action. All is seen from there : Higuerota, the gulf, the great plains, the sea. The implements of modern times connect it with the capitals of Europe and of the New World. The steamer called 'Ceres' takes the great



'Holroyd', -the 'head of immense iron and silver interests' with his 'religion of iron and silver' and his 'Caesarean head', back into the 'Olympus of Plutocrats', (p.68) shown as the centre of the modern world, -a building 'of glass, steel, stone- cobwebbed aloft by the radiation of telegraph wires' (p.80). Sulaco has a privileged interest for him because 'he is running a man' there (p.81).

In the same way as he has mastered the art of description in the service of his fiction, so Conrad has achieved mastery in the art of drawing characters. They are briefly sketched at first, then characterised in a few brief phrases, in key with the preponderant aspect of their appearance, and then enlarged upon in the course of the action. Captain Mitchell, shown in his appearance to be brother to all the other old sailors, with their strength and moral integrity and simplicity, -or better absurdity of mind, is characterised in a few phrases :

.. a saying .. was very often on his lips :  
'We never make mistakes'. To the Company's officers it took the form of a severe injunction .. 'Smith knows no more of this continent than a baby! ..  
'Our excellent Senor Mitchell' for the business and official world of Sulaco (who were partly mean and flattering rascals); 'Fussy Joe' for the commanders of the Company's ships. Captain Joseph Mitchell prided himself on his profound knowledge of men and things in the country (p.10).

Always utterly in the dark, and imagining himself to be in the thick of things -- almost every event out of the usual daily course 'marked an epoch' for him or else was 'history' .. (p.112)

The long part of the narrative through his mouth forms part of the force of persistent irony in the book, because we are constantly aware of the true portent of events, as opposed to the opinions which he forms in his

simple and ill-informed mind.

Old Giorgio Viola, like his hero Garibaldi, or his adopted son Gian Battista, was a sailor. He is the man with a pure liberal and humanitarian ideal and a strong unbroken faith in them carried through a life full of fight and turmoil. Their value for him is not bound up with success. Nostromo is set off against him as Gould against Don José Avellanós, who has preserved his patriotic faith through torture and agony. Both, Viola and Avellanós, are distinguished by their utter disregard for material means, and for that reason are favourites of Mrs. Gould. Viola is shown from outside, set off against the crowd, characterised briefly and made more real by his symbolic relation to his surroundings and his abode :

Old Giorgio Viola, a Genoese with a shaggy head - often called simply 'the Garibaldino' (as Mohammedans are called after their prophet) is (p.16) an old fighter with a leonine face (p.20). In his typical attitude, repeatedly shown, he is 'leaning back his leonine head against the lintel and looking up .. at the snowy dome of Higuerota.. ' (p.26) People ask him 'what he had got out of it after all.. There was nothing that they could see..' (p.32) He has 'divine force of faith.. great pity for all that was poor, suffering and oppressed in this world.. a spirit of self-forgetfulness, the simple devotion to a vast humanitarian idea, austere contempt for all personal advantage, despises money', has a 'stern devotion to a lost cause, a soldierlike standard of faithfulness and duty, as if the world were a battlefield where men had to fight for the sake of universal love and brotherhood, instead of a more or less large share of booty .. ' (p.26, p.313)

(His silver-hair is compared with the snow of Higuerota, of which the chief of the engineers says : 'we cannot move a mountain'. Here, Mrs. Gould 'was convincingly remembered near the snow-line' (p.46), and here Father Corbelan roams in solitude to convert Indians.)

Viola is further characterised through the image of the room in his cafe, and its 'bare, white-washed walls', with its 'disarranged tables and chairs', which he had chosen as a 'retreat' (p.18) at the beginning of the revolution. At the moment of greatest danger he sits in it with his gun on his lap, finger at the trigger, and it seems an abode of peace in the heart of turmoil. There is nothing on its walls but, lit up by 'narrow bright lines of sunshine', 'a coloured litograph of Garibaldi' the 'immortal hero of Liberty', whose imprisonment had given him a 'shock' which 'had instilled into him a gloomy doubt of ever being able to understand the ways of Divine justice' (p.18, p.26). After the 'greatest danger' (p.21), is over he 'turned to the picture of his old chief, first and only, then laid his hand on his wife's shoulder'. His wife in a way is a victim of his faith in an ideal, and of his exile resulting from it. At this crucial moment we see her in a black dress in the middle of that room, her two little girls clinging to her. Her fate is forecast, in her typical gesture, when she looks at him :

And while she looked at him she would sometimes put her hand hastily to her side with a short twitch of her fine lips and a knitting of her black, straight eye-brows like a flicker of angry pain or an angry thought on her handsome, regular features. (p.25)

Don José Avellanós is absorbed in the contemplation and pursuit of his ideals in the same way, disregarding the love lavished on him, because of his stubborn faith : he 'accepted' the 'devotion of his beloved Antonia in the benighted way of men, who, though made in God's image, are like stone idols without sense before the smoke of certain burnt offerings.. ' (p.140)

The most obvious example of the utter disregard of ties of love for the sake of an ideal is shown in the relationship Gould - Mrs. Gould. Gould's image is also connected with his room, which contains 'books, mainly firearms, carbines, guns, revolvers, pistols.. an old cavalry sabre, once the property of Don Enrique Gould (who was shot in a revolution)' with its 'plastered white walls.. completely bare, except for a water-colour sketch of the San Tomé mine .. the work of Dona Emilia herself - and a glass-show-case containing specimens of ore..' (p.69, p.70)

We have the image of Mrs. Gould, who is always connected with flowers and precious gems, turning her back on this room :

In contrast with the white glaring room the dimly lit corridor had a restful mysteriousness of a forest glade.. In the streaks of light falling through the open doors of the reception-rooms, the blossoms, white and red and pale lilac, came out vivid with the brilliance of flowers in a stream of sunshine; and Mrs. Gould, passing on, had the vividness of a figure seen in the clear patches of sunshine that chequer the gloom of open glades in the woods. The stones in the rings upon her hand pressed to her forehead glittered in the lamplight.. (pp.209-210)

She is always connected with the 'Madonna in blue robes with the crowned child sitting on her arm', (p.68) standing on the flight of stairs in the patio of her house. The statue at last has 'a look of pitying tenderness' for her.

An excellent example of the high degree of symbolic <sup>9</sup>pregnancy in this book, -evidence of Conrad's mastery in showing the underlying significance of facts through images, though not through action-, is the rendering of the meeting of Mr. und Mrs. Gould, in which their fates are joined together. Gould has just received the news of his father's death, caused by his despair over the

crushing burden of the silver-mine. Just as Nostromo's fate and the outcome of the book is anticipated in the tale of the gringos, so is theirs in this image (this scene takes place in the huge decaying hall of an old palace) :

These two young people remembered the life which had ended wretchedly just when their own lives had come together .. in that splendour of hopeful love .. (p.74) .. an octagon columnar stands bearing a heaving marble vase ornamented with sculptural masks and garlands of flowers, and cracked from top to bottom. He was contemplating with a penetrating and motionless stare the cracked marble urn as though he had resolved to fix its shape for ever in his memory .. (His imagination had been permanently affected by the one great fact of a silver-mine - p.77) She murmured 'poor boy' and began to dry her eyes .. very small in her simple, white frock, almost like a lost child crying in the degraded grandour of the noble hall, while he stood by her, again perfectly motionless in the contemplation of the marble urn .. But he was actually not looking at her at all; and his expression was tense and irrational, as is natural in a man who elects to stare at nothing past a young girl's head. (pp.61-63)

Mrs. Gould, the woman who is 'always sorry for homesick people' (p.46), adored by those who have suffered and failed, was at first 'inspired by an idealistic view of success' (p.67). She is 'full of unselfishness and sympathy', and 'the most legitimate touch of materialism is lacking in her'. Later the whole proceeding 'seems to her the most awful materialism' (p.83), and she comes to hate wealth and the mine, pardoning and hiding Nostromo's guilt. She probably has also been guilty of his fate, and she is punished by becoming 'as solitary as any human being had ever been, perhaps, on this earth' (p.555):

The history of the mine .. was in essence the history of her married life (p.66). The inspiration of her early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver bricks, erected by the silent work of evil spirits, between her and her husband.. (p.222)



Her love is crushed by the mine, but suffering and mute she does her work of love with her 'two lieutenants - the doctor and the priest' (p.75)

Nostromo and Gould are the two men in the forefront of events, 'racially and socially contrasted'. They form the heads of the two main groups which comprise the social pattern of the book. Nostromo is 'the man of the people', under the guard of the old Garibaldino. Gould is the man at the top, at his back the old aristocrat Avellanos. Their European descent and upbringing is stressed. Both are men in the forefront of the great push for economic progress. In contrast to Conrad's earlier heroes, both are essentially men of action, extremely competent and efficient, without illusions as to the business of living, -very self-confident. Both know very well what they want : Gould's aim is 'correct, definite in space and absolutely attainable within a limited time' (p.80). Physically and intellectually they are both excellently fitted for their business, and they are, from a material point of view, tremendously successful. They have bound up their lives with material success, having 'pinned their faith to material interests' (p.84), and are defeated by the mine, disregarding the warning of the dead. Conrad states : 'Our daily work must be done to the glory of the dead, and for the good of those who come after' (p.521), which from Dr. Monygam's mouth is the statement that 'the dead must not be contradicted' (p.319). Dona Theresa's last words haunt Nostromo, and Gould has no children, making true in his life that which his dying father had warned him of : 'He was afraid I would hang on to the ruinous thing.. and waste my life miserably. That was the true sense of his prohibition' (p.73). The curse of the dead hangs over them, and both are morally ruined. Nostromo is destroyed, and Gould sacrifices the faith of his early life for the existence of the mine which, from being a means to an end

at first has become an end in itself. Both are dominating figures, seen mostly on horseback.

Charles Gould, the 'Inglez', the 'heretic pilgrim' (p.47), is mostly seen when leaving his home and his wife for the mine : 'Charles Gould, with one foot on a low wooden stool, was already strapping his spurs' (p.69). When riding in or out of town he passes 'the equestrian statue of Charles IV', with 'his marble arm raised to the marble brim of his hat' (p.47). During his youth in Britain he was told over and over again that his 'future was blighted because of the possession of a silver-mine', and warned to keep clear of Costaguana. He feels with his young wife that they are :

'morally bound to make good their vigorous view of life against the unnatural error of weariness and despair.. If the idea of wealth was present to them it was only so far as it was bound up with that other success.. Charles Gould had been obliged to keep the idea of wealth well to the fore; but he brought it forward as a means, not as an end. (p.75)

This fact makes his plans palatable to the man, whose financial help he needs. The latter's participation in the project is 'a great man's extravagance, big enough to flatter his vanity, -sanctioned by a moral intention' (p.378). He considers God as 'an influential partner, -but under no circumstances will consent to throw good money after bad' (p.80). He will in 'a given case, drop' Gould relentlessly (p.82). So Gould constantly stands under the threat of the fact that 'for primitives, recognition of success is the only standard of morality' (p.378). 'His English, rock-like quality of character' however, 'is his best safe-guard' (p.86). Here are Gould's views on starting his work in the mine :

What is wanted here is law, good, faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests .. they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue

to exist .. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people .. The mine .. may become that little rift in the darkness .. He had given a vast shape to the vagueness of her unselfish ambitions ..

Gould was competent because he had no illusions .. He was prepared to stoop for his weapons .. he felt that the worthiness of his life was bound up with success. (p.84, p.85) But very soon 'he felt as if the silver-mine, which had killed his father, had decoyed him further than he meant to go.' (p.85)

Gould did not fully assess the dark and irrational powers of the country. They are however always present at his right elbow in the image of the parrot with its irritated and angry shriek : 'Viva Costaguana'. Equally he could not assess the force and corrupting influence of the mine. It is distinctly seen as an agent, standing for the seductive influence of the treasures which are 'torn from the bowels of the earth', -the force of the earth and of matter, which tries to enslave men. It is presented as a strong spiritual force, as unmitigated evil. At the beginning it is called the 'very Paradise of snakes', and soon Mrs. Gould states : 'We have disturbed a good many snakes in that paradise'. (p.209) The mine has 'raised a fine crop of hates, vengeance, murder, rapine' (p.310). The outcome of all action, as tied up with the fate of the agents, is from the very beginning shown to be disastrous (Decoud, coming to Sulaco : 'It's like a tile falling on my head .' - p.153) The underlying cause of the disaster, as is equally evident from the beginning, is the influence of the mine, 'the head and front of the material interests' (p.203). 'The mine had been the cause of an absurd moral disaster; its working must be made a serious and moral success' (p.66), 'its yield had been paid for in its own weight of human bones' (p.52). In Gould's intention :

.. The mine was to become an institution, a rallying point for everything in the province that needed order

and stability to live. Security seemed to flow upon this land .. organisation .. privileged safety' (p.110) It has soon become 'a power in the land, -Imperium in imperio' (p.110). Its workers wear 'white ponchos with a green stripe .. the colour of hope' and 'the lights of the San Tomé had twinkled night after night upon the great, limitless shadow of the Campo; .. The thunder of explosions rolls over it at night' (p.135). But soon, 'modern in its spirit, the mine had already thrown its sudden influence' (p.97).

Those who know the country feel uneasy at the thought of all the greed and savagery that will be roused by its riches . This Gould is at first able to keep under, by bribery, by 'corruption - the irresponsible potency to ruin everything it touched'. Gould 'suffered from it, but he refused to discuss the ethical view with his wife .. ' (p.143). When Mrs. Gould was still holding her idealistic view of the silver-mine, and the first bar came out of the earth :

.. she endowed that lump of metal with a justificative conception, as though it were not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and impalpable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergence of a principle. (p.107)

It is the emergence of a principle, but quite other than it seemed at first.

The fate of the San Tomé mine was lying heavy upon her heart. It was a long time now since she had begun to fear it. It had been an idea. She had watched it with misgivings turning into a fetish, and now the fetish had grown into a monstrous and crushing weight. (p.221)

And this is how it finally presents itself to Nostromo :

The mine appeared to him nateful and immense, lording it by its vast wealth over the valour, the toil, the fidelity of the poor, over war and peace, over the labours of the towns, the sea, and the Campo. (p.503)

And here is Dr. Monygam's final judgement on the object of Gould's faith :

There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle.



The time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and the misrule of a few years back (p.511).

The man in whose fate the merciless logic of things leading to inevitable doom is shown most clearly and elaborately, is Nostromo -the man at the heart of the tale, who 'has taken a curse upon himself with a spell on his life' (p.259), and was finally 'killed by the silver' (p.559), its 'faithful and lifelong slave'. He is the man 'whose very essence, value, reality consisted in its reflection from the admiring eyes of men' (p.525). He is tempted by a man, or rather a devil, whom 'the king of devils himself had sent out that night of all the nights of his life' (p.462). He commits a 'transgression, a crime 'which :

entering a man's existence, eats it up like a malignant growth, consumes it like a fever. Nostromo had lost his peace; the genuineness of all his qualities was destroyed. He felt it himself, and often cursed the silver .. His courage, his magnificence, his leisure, his work, everything was as before, only everything was a sham. (p.523)

Only his betrayal is real and his life is sapped of its essence. He goes about, -the man who wanted nothing but to be 'well-spoken of' -, working to hide the dark spot and suffering from it. He is the incorporation of Conrad's central theme, -the 'man of the people'-, the exceptional individuality which is true to the general formula expressing the moral state of mankind.

Nostromo is brought in very carefully. His fate is anticipated in the tale of the gringos. From the first moment we see him through the twist of opinion which Mitchell's particular judgment contains for us. Here is his first appearance:

Providentially, Nostromo -invaluable fellow .. was at hand and managed to snatch him away. (p.12)  
Under providence we owed our preservation to my Capataz de Cargadores. I discovered his value, Sir. He left her



(his ship) on account of some very respectable friends .. but also, I suppose, to better himself. Sir, I am a pretty good judge of character .. This Nostromo, sir, a man absolutely above reproach, became the terror of all the thieves in the town .. They quailed before him, sir. That's what the force of character will do for you. (p.13)

Captain Mitchell's good opinion casts the first suspicion on Nostromo in our, the onlooker's eye, before we have ever seen him. On the climax of action we hear of Nostromo, the 'Incorruptible and Faithful, Fidanza', at the height of his reputation, before the 'fatality', in Mitchell's terms, occurred. There is, at the same climax, Theresa's statement : 'You have no heart -and you have no conscience, Gian Battista' (p.23). We have an occasional glimpse of Nostromo now and then, on horseback during the uproar, lifting his body from his blanket and lighting his cigarette near the snow-line in the night, and then, only at the end of the first part of the book, comes the excellent scene of Nostromo's magnificent appearance on horseback in the midst of the people. He is admired with awe and fear, and shows his splendid and careless generosity to the Morenita. As seen by Decoud in the second part of the book there is still 'the muffled-up mysteriousness of the dark figure with an invisible face concealed by a great Sombrero' (p.186). The fatal errand with the silver into the dark gulf is superb in its perfection of rendering, although taking up considerable space. It provides 'the supreme test' (p.256) for Nostromo and shows the usual haunting emphasis on stillness and darkness which accompanies the crucial moment of the spiritual action. Afterwards, when Nostromo meets Dr. Monygam, there are brief allusions to the usual paraphernalia accompanying the great moral shock. There is the darkness and the reeling of the globe, the irresolution checking a man's force at the pitch of the struggle in his soul (p.433, p.462).

We see the struggle only from outside and must guess at its essence through Nostromo's gestures and muffled words.

Nostromo is now an 'outcast' (p.501), and the treasure is 'paid for by a soul lost and by a vanished life' (Decoud-p.502). The part of the book dealing with the events after the revolution is but an afterlude in which Nostromo's fate is fulfilled, - the curse of the dead woman whom he left, though reluctantly, on her deathbed - refusing to help her to a last consolation. Again he disregards her will when he betrays Linda, who is betrothed to him, for the sake of her younger sister. Here she is waiting for him at night:

..as if waiting for the confirmation of the incredible. The hopeless blackness of the clouds seemed part of a dream, too. She waited.

She did not wait in vain. The man whose soul was dead within him creeping out of the ravine, weighted with silver, had seen the gleam of the lighted window..

On that impenetrable background, obliterating the lofty mountain by the seaboard, she saw the slave of the San Tome'silver, as if by an extraordinary power of a miracle. She accepted his return as if henceforth the world could hold no surprise for eternity.

(p.544)

This passage shows how much Conrad is still concerned with his truth, and how strongly the end of the book has gained a merly spiritual flavour at the expense of action. Under the tree where he left Decoud alone Nostromo is shot by Viola, who thinks that he has shot a 'thief', unable to imagine the depth of corruption in his 'son Gian Battista', just as Lingard stood bewildered before Willems' betrayal.

There is already something of Conrad's later manner of writing in this book, when the forces of evil are no longer full characters, but assume allegoric shape , as in deBarral, or Jones:

The imbecile and domineering stare of the glorious victor of Rio Seco (General Montero) had in it something ominous and incredible; the exaggeration of a cruel caricature, the fatuity of solemn masquerading, the atrocious grotesqueness of some military idol of Aztec conception and European bedecking, awaiting the homage of worshippers, a weird and inscrutable portent.....  
(p.122)

We have now considered Conrad's art of description and character-drawing at some length, considering but the main characters of the book. Beside them, there is a great range of minor characters, all of whom are brought in with their story. This required a great amount of difficult grouping for the sake of coherent action. Conrad, fortunately, did without the help of a personal narrator as a hold and a substitute for the story. Part of the action is rendered through the mouth of Mitchell, and part through Decoud's letter, which provides a valuable enrichment of point of view. On the whole however, the book is told in an objective manner, with only a bearable and apt amount of comment. This demanded a colossal effort from Conrad. His main concern is still there, - the elucidation of 'truth' conveyed through comment on the action, but exclusively seen through the arrangement of the parts of the narrative, partly through action and mainly through the aspect of the characters and of the setting. The strongest emphasis lies on character-drawing, since the truth is to be revealed through this medium. On review, one remembers the book as a series of characters, all splendidly drawn, contrasted and opposed to each other, - not as a coherent straight and moving chain of action. As the ultimate fate of the main characters is anticipated, so is the ultimate outcome of all action. The book starts with a climax<sup>and</sup> is rendered in episodes which serve to introduce and show the great variety of characters.

These are not strictly coherent in time and place, nor chronologically arranged. There are several outstanding examples of Conrad's disregard of action. He drops the action at its climax at the expense of the dramatic tension which he has just then created, and brings characters in. At the climax of Nostromo's and Decoud's desperate errand in the gulf comes the encounter with Sotillo's steamer. The narrative switches over to the steamer and several pages are devoted to the introduction of Sotillo. The story of the lighter, - with its splendidly dramatic whispers -, is then continued. Nostromo's greatest feat, his desperate ride to Cayta which brings salvation for Sulaco, is completely omitted. In the same way Conrad drops the crucial encounter of Nostromo and Dr. Monygam near the corpse of Hirsch and elucidates the mystery of the latter's death, to continue the conversation of Nostromo and Dr. Monygam after this long interruption. From page 86 to page 112, - over 26 pages-, starting with a trip of the Goulds over the Campo, in search for labour, we have a dense jumble of action from various places and times, devoted to character-drawing. There is Gould's encounter with a 'provincial Excellency', then the introduction of his, - 'El Rey de Sulaco's'-, Moraga advocate in Sta. Marta, and a rendering of the latter's particular position there. Then, at the beginning of the new chapter, we come to Nostromo's position when he is rousing his cargadores in the early morning; there is the image of the slums and the development of the town by the influence of the mine, followed by the introduction of Don P  p   with his story. There is the building-up of the villages near the mine, the description of the main buildings and their organization for the working population of the mine, and the latter's coming from all over the country. Then the story and description of the position of Father Roman in the vil-



lages follows, with an outline of his relation to 'El Senor Gobernador'. There is the arrival of the Goulds and the beginning of their work, the winning of the first silver, Mrs. Gould's reflections on it connected with the first appearance of Hernandez and his peasant-outlaws. We are shown the first silver-escort going to the harbour, and the raving of a 'prominent man' in the capital at Gould's power in the province. Finally there is the first picture of Mrs. Gould's drawing room, a discussion of the position of the mine, Mitchell's position in the drawing room, and a further bit of his characterization. We are literally whirled around in time and space and yet there is no impression of incoherence or of sketchiness, - there is always the centre around which everything turns - the mine, and its silver. Not far from it (its first appearance in Conrad), is Mrs. Gould's drawing room, in which all the threads are woven which on the whole determine the course of the action. Conrad never strays so far from his path as to let us lose sight of this central point. In spite of the apparent disregard of coherence and sequence of action then, there are several aspects of the book which make up for the loss of unity. First there is the setting, in which, like the ship in earlier books, the whole development is concentrated. The setting is excellently described and we are thoroughly familiar with it. Partly based on its evocation, there is in the book a dense mesh of symbolic meaning, all pointing in the same direction. Its truth is the disintegration of character under the pressure of the materialistic claims of modern society, and all fates are anticipated. This direction of events is never forgotten throughout the book, and we are kept conscious of the fact that all action, however efficient, is ultimately futile because of its futile purpose.



The creation and grouping of characters for the elucidation of this truth is the principle upon which the book is written. Its aim is attained in a most impressive manner. The coherence and movement of the basic stories are sacrificed for this effect, but not destroyed. There is a balance between the necessity of story-telling and the particular purpose of the writer. It is evident that the impact of the book, and of the particular effects attained by this manner of narration, would have been much weaker had it been told in a coherent and chronological story. In fact Conrad could not then have evoked this tremendous range of views. From the point of view of fiction, the disregard of the conventional manner of telling the story is, therefore, perfectly justified. Conrad, in this book, has achieved something greater and better than a writer of conventional fiction ever could have done. His congenial manner of writing is at its best.

The Secret Agent.

In this book Conrad has turned his back on the sea, 'the reflector of the world's light' (p.XII) and has ventured into the heart of society, 'a cruel devourer of the world's light', (p.XII) from where all the struggles of the men at its outposts drew their substance. The setting of the book is London, its theme is the presentation of certain aspects of the underworld of society, as revealed in its creatures and in those who have to control them.

Conrad repeatedly tried to adapt his novels and stories for the stage, but they were never effective as plays. In 1919 he adapted 'The Secret Agent'. The play, performed when he was at the climax of his fame, failed. In order to adapt it Conrad had to lay bare the mere bones of the story. On this occasion he wrote to Pinker:

As I go on in my adaptation, stripping off the garment of artistic expression and consistent irony which clothes the story in the book, I perceive more clearly how it is bound to appear to the collective mind of the audience a merely horrible and sordid tale.

I will confess that I myself had no idea of what the story was till I came to grips with it in this process of dramatization - of course I can't stop now.  
(to J.B. Pinker, Nov. 11.19..., pp.233-234)

There could be no clearer admission of the fact that Conrad was not at all concerned with the story as such. Conrad is not interested in action as such or its consequences, but in its motives, its 'inspiring secret'. Inside the book we have the story of a 'maternal passion' connected with an event of 'absurd cruelty' (p.XII), around which the book is

centered. On the surface it is the story of the fate of Mr. Verloc and of those dependant on him, seen in contrast to his revolutionary 'comrades' and to the police, against the vast and dark background of the great city. The course of action is fairly straight, chronological and coherent. In the first part, taking one fifth of the book, the main characters are brought in and the main setting is provided. - The bulk of the book deals with the afternoon following on the event of 'absurd cruelty', and does not contain action but lengthy conversations which are frequently interrupted by long trains of thoughts of the characters themselves, delving into their own motives, and the authors comment on them. The conversation between Chief Inspector Heat for example and the Assistant Commissioner, takes 36 pages out of the whole of about 300. In this book, as in most of Conrad's fiction, the climax is anticipated but not rendered. It is skipped and then all the threads leading up to it are explored. The explanation of the causes of the departure of Mrs. Verloc's mother, the Dickensian coach-ride to the old people's home, and the return of Mrs. Verloc with Stevie, without any action almost, takes 36 pages. The part on Mr. Verloc's return and his death, containing very little action, also takes 36 pages. They all tend to show that absolute loneliness in which every human being lives - everybody with his particular vision and set of consciousness or set of values, - in Conrad's words with his particular folly. The long trains of thought of Mr. and Mrs. Verloc show their absolute isolation, despite the fact that they have been married for years. The culmination of Conrad's sardonic irony is Winnie's staring at the white-washed wall behind Mr. Verloc's head, who cannot see anything when he turns for a look, although his death is written there. In all these conversations there

are frequent episodes or memories blended in in flashbacks and long reflections of the agents on the theme at heart of the book. The idiot child Stevie is the image of pure and innocent goodness which has no place in modern society, -which is completely determined by economic facts -, and he falls victim to the demons it has brought forth. As seen through the different characters, the book is a demonstration and a reflection on the evil which is generated in a society organized by economic necessities. The characters are different forms of adaptation to this reality, which are revealed through their reflections. In the words of the 'apostle Michaelis' there is no real remedy from this state of affairs, or at least this form of society is doomed to perish. In spite of the chronological coherence and straight sequence of the book, its drama is diluted to a great extent by the constant conversations and reflections, which had been almost dropped in Nostromo. Conrad had applied this treatment of purpose, and states in its preface:

--the purely artistic purpose-- of applying an ironic method to a subject of that kind, was formulated with deliberation and in the earnest belief that ironic treatment alone would enable me to say all I felt I would have to say in scorn as well as in pity.

(p.XIII)

The inspiring motive for the 'whole treatment' for Conrad was 'indignation.. pity and contempt'. A reading of his essays and letters proves that he put a good deal of his own opinions into those voiced by the characters in this book. At the same time, this ironic method served to conceal the author and proved an outlet for the comment which in earlier books he could express through his guise Marlow. The application of an objective manner of narration to the exclusion of analysis of thought accounts to a great extent for the outstanding quality of 'Nostromo', but in this book

Conrad forfeits the advantage by extensive analysis. The material of action is thin as it is, and the frequent conversations, - lengthened by trains of thought-, make the book essentially static. As in all previous books, the outcome of action is inconclusive in essence. Although 'life doesn't stand much looking into' (p.XIII) Winnie Verloc, by a moral shock, is forced to look into it and ends in suicide. We are not the wiser in the end for all the problems raised, for 'true wisdom', as Conrad tells us, 'is not certain of anything in this world of contradictions'. From the point of view of the conventional story however, this book is a nearer approach to it than any of the previous books. It shows clearly at the same time, that Conrad found it very difficult to keep clear of interfering through his opinions, of forcing some 'truths' down the reader's throat. In the afterlude to Winnie's death, it is brought home to us, rather obtrusively, - in italics and without-, that 'an impenetrable mystery' was sure 'to hang for ever (p.307) as far as all mankind was concerned'. That was Comrade Ossipon's 'cursed knowledge', the man who 'was marching in the gutter as if in training for the task of an inevitable future'.

Apart from Conrad's insistence on his truth, it is again the same aspect which had given Nostromo its outstanding quality, which also makes this book a masterpiece. - Everything is once again essentially seen, the mood pervading the book is written all over the face of the matter surrounding the characters. It is endowed with dense symbolic meaning which makes it an agent and brings it to life. There is for example the part played by the bread-carving knife, the white washed wall without a writing at the back of Mr. Verloc's head, or the meaning of Stevie's circles. Character-drawing, as seen from their outside rendering, is



again excellent, but in some examples it tends to become 'flat', - characters as incarnations of one preponderant aspect, as shown in Stevie, or in the contrast of the Professor with Michaelis, - the one seeing the salvation of mankind in the destruction of the weak, the other in their loving protection. This is the necessary outcome of Conrad's purpose in writing this book, and of his fiction on the whole. His ironic method was applied deliberately to bring out his truth most sharply. It is the fact that every human being is seen in essence as a completely isolated consciousness, utterly at variance with every other human being, and lucidly unaware of his own motives. This fact is brought out more forcibly than in Nostromo, because the irony pervading the whole shows the individually limited purpose, - and the line of action taken for its attainment by every single character-, to be ridiculously foolish, and the whole of life, as a pattern composed by such individual consciousnesses, an intricate and indissoluble tangle of problems. This is frankly stated, but is far more forcibly impressed on us by the composition of the whole - proof that Conrad has achieved his aim of rendering his 'truth' through his vision as well as through his method. The supreme triumph of this contrast of individual consciousnesses, excellent in the contrast Nostromo - Dr. Monygam, is in this book the final scene between Verloc and his wife. The secret agent is so completely ignorant of the quality of the human being next to him that he fails to read the presence of his death when it is inevitably looking at him, and <sup>he</sup> even invites it to come, thereby provoking the desperate act. In a certain way, Conrad's very aim of writing is incompatible with coherence and harmony of action - apart from certain sea-stories. Life is an incomprehensible state of affairs, with all agents in it lucidly ignorant

of its nature, could not inform be shown as a coherent, straight forward line of action with a conclusive and meaningful end. The 'impenetrable mystery' is, rather unnecessarily, left open and impressed on us during the last pages. We can surmise from a number of details that the Assistant Commissioner plays the part of the writer himself. There is a striking likeness to Conrad in his appearance and his circumstances of life. He is the only really sympathetic character in the book but also has no answer for the problems roused either. He acts on the assumption that life is such a ridiculous affair and defines his task to the 'high personage' in a way which seems to strike the key-note of the author's attitude towards the creatures of his pen and towards life, despite his scalding sarcasm. The Assistant Commissioner is talking about the Chief Inspector:

For him the plain duty is to fasten the guilt upon as many prominent anarchists as he can on some slight indications he had picked up in the course of his investigation.. whereas I, he would say, am bent upon vindicating their innocence'.

(p.142)

## CONCLUSION .

From the point of view of method, there is not much which had not been touched before, to be said now for the rest of Conrad's work. In Under Western Eyes we have a return to the typical betrayal and the theme of guilt and remorse. As in the case of Jim the book was begun as a short-story and the first part told in an objective manner. Then it took hold of Conrad and was continued with the help of a narrator, in this case an old teacher of languages, another Marlow. Conrad states himself that he needed the old man as a confidant to make Natalie Haldin credible, and of course he provides the usual outlet for Conrad's comment on the spectacle.

In Chance, we have Marlow's return. He calls himself the 'confidant' (p.311) of Flora de Barral, and is ironically called 'the expert in the psychological wilderness' (p.311). As in the case of Jim, he accompanies the young girl throughout her life with proper comment, and in the view of some critics, rather made a nuisance of himself, because he has to bear the full burden which should have been carried by a coherent story, and had to make it credible at the same time throughout the whole length of the novel. Marlow is considerably less effective, apparently, in a novel, than in a mere story.

In Victory, Conrad has again succeeded in telling a novel in a sustained objective manner, and it is decidedly superior in method to those which are knit together by the person of the narrator.

If we try to pin down the general characteristics of

Conrad's methods, we can say, that he tends to anticipate the climax of action, -its outcome, after a short introduction. Then he centres the main part of his book around this central situation, and gives a short afterlude when all threads leading up to it have been exploited. The parts of the narrative which are grouped around the central situation, -mostly the decisive event in the life of the main character- are the stories of the secondary characters, and illustrations of their attitudes towards the hero. The decisive event forcing the hero to take a stand on crucial questions of human existence, and attitudes, throwing light on the hero and on each other at the same time. It was Conrad's paramount aim to enlighten the 'truth' at core, and characters and action are strictly subordinated to it. The arrangements of these 'episodes' now, the rendering of events, from various times and places, for the sake of character-drawing with a view to his truth, are incompatible with straight and coherent action in time and place. The only fact which gives direction to the action is the foreknowledge of its fatal outcome. The tension forfeited by the giving away of this fact is substituted by the emphasis on the mystery of human attitudes, which inevitably cause this outcome. We have seen that in his first books there was an abundance of description and analysis - lengthy reflection-, and a fatal incoherence by the lack of unity in the different episodes of his narratives.

He succeeded in cutting description and analysis to what was strictly relevant for the actual and spiritual action - and this effort was part of his attempt to bring the variety of view-points he deems expedient into a coherent pattern. We have his word that the history of his books consists of his development of grouping and lighting, - of finding a compromise between the necessity of a simple and coherent story as a vessel for the other aspects of his novels, and

the demonstration of his truth. He succeeded in attaining this compromise in his greatest novels. He was however incapable of returning to the conventional pattern of story-telling because it was incompatible with his aims of writing: to prove that life is not a simple and conclusive and meaningful whole, but a confusing and contradictory maze of indissoluble problems, attacked by each isolated individual according to his own selfish motives.

Mégroz, in his penetrating study on Conrad, has made a good attempt at summarizing the particular quality of the latter's methods:

His difficult originality of method was imposed upon him by his autobiographical material which in the beginning had to be stretched over the complete conception of a story. The gaping crevasses which appeared as the imaginative avalanche rode over the stony bed of hard facts had then to be filled up with all he knew about human nature. That is how A.F. assumed its episodic shape, and that is why his biggest efforts draw upon Polish memories for atmosphere. (p.204)

The need to fill these crevasses answered Conrad's need of saying what he felt it incumbent on him to say - he was a subjective writer fundamentally who had imposed the limitations of a strictly objective rendering on himself, and constantly sinned against it when Marlow as a mouthpiece was not at hand. Even at the very end of his life he was not convinced that this was not allowed to the writer of fiction:

I think that an author who tries to 'explain' is exposing himself to a very great risk - the risk of confessing himself a failure. For a work of art should speak for itself. Yet much could be said on the other side; for it is also clear that a work of art is not a logical demonstration carrying its intention on the face of it.

(To F.N. Doubleday, 2. June 1924)

The limitation of Conrad's imaginative faculty may



partly account for the abundance of description and analysis in the early work, but not for his particular methods; Mégroz talks of:

characters that are introduced in such a way as to heighten tension and interest gradually, the secondary characters first, with only glimpses of the main characters. His memories are promiscuous and without any obvious plan - the to and fro of the narrative is illogical in a high degree - life - like in a narrow sense. The narrative is moving along the mental channels of certain characters. (p.207)

The recession in time is like the recession of the lenses of a telescope. (p.207)

The logical progression in time, from event to event, satisfies the crude curiosity (of the reader) which asks of a story-teller, 'what happened next?' When the psychological interest in the chief characters is to be of greater interest than mere events, then another order begins to operate, an order which interrupts the time-sequence, as it is interrupted in Nostromo. There can be no story without the time sequence of events, and as we cannot think backwards, every time it begins operating again after the interruption, is in the direction of past to the future. If this forward momentum is too frequently impeded, the story loses its momentum, and the events consequently suffer diminution of dramatic value. (p.212)

The parts of the skeleton which is called the plot need to be articulated into a recognizable semblance of dramatic order.

Chance marks the culmination of Conrad's loosening of the logical time-sequence to make room for psychological associations centering around the chief characters. (pp.212-221)

Mégroz touches on Conrad's intentions of expressing his particular view of reality through the form of his fiction:

The details and the events encourage and feed our curiosity, but the vision which makes them part of a memorable experience calls for more depth than these alone can achieve, even when the writer .. pretends to be quite aloof.. (p.199)

While the events are being pictured the parable is being composed between the lines, and the very shape of

the plot, that simplest element of a story, is casting a symbolic shadow on the spiritual drama. The order in which the reader acquires facts and impressions is a part of the process which is shaping the vision. The arrangement called 'plot' is therefore as important as style: it shares with style the creation of atmosphere, which is the sense of a story's peculiar reality.

More obviously than is usual in fiction, Conrad's handling of plots is a means of creating atmosphere and giving a sense of depth, that is reality to the characters. (p.200)

Conrad's innovation is in effect a daring extension of the story-teller's freedom in rejecting time-sequence in favour of an ideal dramatic logic.

He is as sure of his direction as Balzac, but gives the novel an immensely increased freedom of imaginative association. (p.204)

## Conrad's Creed as an Artist.

Before we proceed to examine the nature of Conrad's vision, we shall try to summarize the principles upon which he wrote his fiction.

Conrad gave splendid expression to his creed as an artist in the preface to the Nigger (Pr.p.4)

'Fiction ... appeals to temperament .. it must be.. the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments. Such an appeal ... must be an impression conveyed through the senses, ... to reach the secret springs of responsive emotions.'

In order to reach this response, the writer has to evoke his own sensations in the face of events, and has to be absolutely truthful in rendering them,-in 'laying bare his own heart'-. Events, people, 'everything is seen through his temperament'. (To Edward Noble, Aubry I, 184, Nov.2, 1895) His imagination should be used 'to create human souls, 'to disclose human hearts'. He 'must treat events only as illustrative of human sensations, as the outward sign of of inward feelings'; he must 'search the darkest corners of his heart, the most remote recesses of his brain, for the image, the truth'.

This means, that action is in itself of minor importance at best, as it only serves to illustrate sensations. It means that such fiction does not primarily show what the characters do, but rather what they feel and think in the face of events. It means, that the vision conveyed through such fiction is entirely subjective, in the nature of a 'most intimate and frank Confession'. (Aubry II, 89, to E.V. Lucas, Oct.6, 1908) But it is not presented as such, as 'the author has to assume an attitude of indifference'. He must keep aloof from the 'creatures made in his image', and render his sensations in an objective manner.

Although he may employ a medium of narration, there is ultimately no mitigating distance between author and reader. The medium is but a transparent veil before the author's face, the more so when, as often happens in Conrad, the author betrays his presence behind that veil by slips of method. Being a fundamentally subjective writer, he is always tempted to explain, as well as to show, and often lets the veil drop.

In Conrad's view, the task of the novelist is the presentation of life. But it is only 'the beginning of the task .. to snatch .. from the rush of time a passing phase of life' and 'to hold it up .. before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood'. His main task is to 'reveal the substance of truth .. through its movement, its form, and its colour ..', to 'disclose its inspiring secret'.

What is of paramount importance then, is not action in itself, It is the motive power behind action, its springs, its why, the question of its cause and aim, - the secret of hearts -. What matters, is the underlying truth of the action, which according to Conrad's self-imposed restriction to an absolutely subjective rendering, in an objective guise, must be the author's personal truth. According to Conrad 'a work of art may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect'.

(Under Western Eyes:) 'My primary conviction that truth alone is the justification of any fiction which makes the least claim to the quality of art'.

f / The author then aims at nothingless than at the disclosure of the SECRET OF EXISTENCE, the discovery of the truth of life, of the essence behind the confusing veil of appearances. Not only does he want to profer this truth as his own however, but also claims a universal

meaning for it. (Aubry II, 204-5, to Barrett H. Clark)  
Every aspect of his fiction has to serve for its elucidation. The story is a mere means of illustration, neglected for its own sake. The characters are mere accessories for his revelation:

In a book you should love the idea and be scrupulously faithful to your conception of life. There lies the honour of the writer, not in the fidelity to his personages. You must never allow them to decoy you out of yourself.

(To John Galsworthy, Nov.11, 1901, Aubry I, p. 301)

In this light, Conrad's ultimate artistic aim: 'to make you see, to make you feel, to make you hear', cannot be taken as the superficial intention of depicting life and the world as they present themselves to our senses. Rather is it, to show them symbolically and bring out their, -from the point of view of the author-, inherent meaning, through the presentation of their outer aspects. It is to show them through his 'turn of mind', and to give us a new, the 'true' vision of them.

In spite of occasional doubts as to the intellectual ground upon which he stood, Conrad had a message to convey. Not writing for mere entertainment, he could not be interested in a story as such, unless it was useful for the truth he felt it incumbent on himself to convey. He did not write fiction for the sake of writing good fiction, nor did he write for money only. -His aim was the revelation of a moral truth, and the story a means of convey<sup>ing</sup> a moral discovery to the reader.

Through the mouth of Marlow, Conrad pledges himself to a mission - that of the torch-bearer, the confessor of truth, who has gained his wisdom in the dark and solitary places of the earth. Many of his heroes make claims to this Messiah-



like task (Jim-Kurtz). He calls his idea and truth a 'gospel', He writes:

Everyone must walk in the light of his own heart's gospel. No man's light is good to any of his fellows. That's my creed from beginning to end. That's my view of life, -a view that rejects all formulas, dogmas and principles of other people's making. These are only a veil of illusions. We are too varied. Another man's truth is only a dismal lie to me. I am telling you things that I would never dream of telling anybody.

(To Edward Noble, Nov.2,95, Aubry I, p.184)

Taken along with his statement to Garnett, that everybody's universe is his 'set of consciousness', these phrases are a radical rejection of all traditional values, both in life and in art. Individual man is declared to be the measure of all things, and all values are at best of relative significance. Concerning Conrad's art, this statement is a complete rejection of tradition and convention in subject-matter and form.

In view of this unconditional subjectivity of the writer, Conrad's objective manner of presentation is nothing but a disguise for his 'gospel'. It veils his intentions, and in a sense the reader is made to lower his defences, taking for objective and absolute what is entirely subjective. Although 'no man's light is good to any of his fellows' Conrad does not say: 'Look, this is life as presented by C.', but he says: 'look, this is life as it is, truly and objectively!'. In the light of these statements it is futile to discuss whether Conrad wants to be didactic or not. The prophet does not preach and explain. He has the truth. As in many other aspects, Conrad's attitude concerning his gospel is strangely inconsequent and ambiguous. He seems humble and overbearing at the same time. There are two possible interpretations of this:

1. Conrad's art, like everything else in life, does not matter at all, taken from an absolute point of view. Thus all his attempts to find the truth must be vain and futile, nobody's truth being of any use to another man.

2. His light is the exception, better than any other man's, and Joseph Conrad is the only one who is the prophet of the truth.

There are correspondingly contradictory statements in his letters. By considering his vision we may find an explanation for this strangely ambivalent and inconclusive attitude, which shows that same mixture of ardour and resignation which can be found in his whole outlook on life and art. One fact however emerges plainly: That in his art, Conrad is the measure of all things, and his universe is Conradese to its furthest extremities. He evidently overestimated the importance of his truth, not realising where the true greatness of his art lies. We may apply to him what Robert Liddell said about E.M. Forster.

It is a truthful, that is a sincere voice that is speaking; but though we never doubt the sincerity, we may at times have grave doubts about the truth of what is said.

(A Treatise on the Novel, p. 65)

## INTRODUCTION

CONRAD: MAN AND MYTH

Joseph Conrad, Esq. J. E. Pinner:

## PART II

### METHOD AND VISION

## INTRODUCTION.

CONRAD: MAN AND WRITER.

Joseph Conrad, to J.B. Pinker:

One may read everybody and yet in the end want to read me - for a change if for nothing else. For I don't resemble anybody; and yet I'm not specialised enough to call up imitators as to matter or style. There is nothing in me but a turn of mind which, whether valuable or worthless, cannot be imitated.

(Aubry II, July 30, 1907, p. 54)

We shall not try to establish in this critical examination whether Conrad's particular manner of presenting life in his fiction 'renders justice to the visible universe', whether his convictions as put forth in it hold true or not. We simply want to know in what way his vision, his peculiar 'turn of mind', influences his use of the story as a creative medium in fiction, and whether his manner of using it is compatible with the writing of good fiction.

We know that Conrad, from the beginning of his writing life, was concerned with conveying an 'idea'. There is nothing to be said against this, as long as this idea is within the range of his subject-matter, and is presented in terms of action and character. The novelist's intention will declare itself through the nature of his subject-matter, the shape it is made to assume, and the method by which he chooses to present his case as strongly as possible. Beyond his intention, there are forces finding expression through him which are not within the range of his conscious assessment. In order to understand, why a novelist writes in his own, characteristic, particular

manner, we must therefore explore the creative soil from which his work has sprung. P.S. Lubbock states:

Though it is true that a man's method depends upon the particular story he is engaged in telling, yet the story that occurs to him, the subject he happens upon, will be that which asks for the kind of treatment congenial to his hand; and so his method will be as part of himself, and will tell us about the quality of his imagination.

(The Craft of Fiction, p. 75)

Vice versa, the quality of his imagination will tell us something about his method. Lord David Cecil elaborates on this point:

A novel is a work of art in so far as it introduces us into a living world; in some respects resembling the world we live in, but with an individuality of its own. Now this world owes its character to the fact that it is begotten by the artist's creative faculty on his experience. His imagination apprehends reality in such a way as to present us with a new vision of it. But in any one artist only some aspects of his experience fertilize his imagination, strike sufficiently deep down into the fundamentals of his personality to kindle his creative spark. His achievement, therefore, is limited to that part of his work which deals with these aspects of his experience.

Experience is not merely that which life places in front of us, it is that which the experiencing eye chooses to let through into the brain; and even before it is consciously worked on, it undergoes considerable transmutation.

(From: Liddell, Robert, a Treatise on the Novel, p. 38)

It is an inner attitude of the writer then, a limited characteristic readiness of perception towards the reality of life and towards his work which determines his creative interest, - his choice of subject-matter -, and his intentions in writing, -the form of expression which he gives to it-.

Robert Liddell in his 'Treatise on the Novel' would separate the novelist's 'personal and private values' from those to be found in his work. The novelist, for the critic, can only be:



The writing self, that part of the whole man who is left in the Ivory Tower, with the door shut, writing books. How much of the whole man that will be will vary from writer to writer. It will depend on how much of the total experience falls within his range as an artist. Our evidence for a writer's values, for what he thinks important, can then only validly be drawn from his writings.

If it was not part of his experience that fell within his range, it has nothing to do with his work; if it fell within his range as a writer, he will himself tell us what we need to know about it - he cannot avoid it. Therefore any heresy-hunt ab extra, and not from the examination of a man's works, is, no matter what principles are behind it, as objectionable as the insistence on an artist's 'racial purity'.

(p. 57)

We shall not discuss here, in how far the knowledge of a writer's convictions ab extra can help to elucidate his work, or in how far 'the writing self' can be separated from the sincere man. The critic of Conrad, as we have seen, is in a difficult position in this respect. Conrad bitterly complained to Garnett that his range of experience was very limited and violently turned against the latter's suggestion of writing in an Ivory Tower. He suffered heavily from his sterility of imagination and had to rely on his limited experience alone, thereby bringing it into his writing in its totality. Moreover, he made the sincerity and honesty of the writer in rendering his convictions as well as his sensations and experience, his 'personal and private values', his truth and his gospel, the very touchstone of his art. He himself admitted, that there is no fundamental difference between his autobiographical writings and his fiction. For all these reasons, the whole man is involved in his fiction, - in writing about people and events 'he is only writing about himself', - the creator can but express himself in his creation-,

though the 'disclosure is not complete'. He remains 'to a certain extent a figure behind the veil; a movement and a voice behind the draperies of fiction'. His work has 'the nature of a confession', his 'creatures are made in his image', as an examination of his personal background will easily prove. Every human being, in his view, has his 'own set of consciousness', and is worlds apart from every other human being, - each is bent upon his own course like a planet in the company of other stars-. 'Another man's truth is only a dismal lie to him', he 'has to lay bare his own heart' and 'walk in his own heart's gospel'. What he aims at is the expression of his own personal and private truth, and its communication to the world at large, under some guise or other. That his truth was and remained inconclusive was due to his perplexity in the face of existence, and his search for an answer to its mysteries determined the form of his writings. We have already quoted sufficient evidence to prove that his convictions as expressed through his work were, in their very totality, the very same convictions he held in the reality of life, and that his theories of writing were the immediate outcome of his temperament and his beliefs. From the outset of his writing-life he was bent upon making a career as a writer. Ford Hueffer gives evidence that he aimed at imitating, through his methods of fiction, life as it in reality, gradually unfolds itself, and at conveying his idea most convincingly in that way. For many years he failed to gain popularity, but even under almost fatal material stress he indignantly refused to alter his convictions, as expressed through his fiction, for the sake of popularity and money. Writing to a friend, with whom he discussed his personal convictions in a long series of letters, he states:

Pray do not regret your letter. I mean to hold my beliefs, - not that I think it matters in the least. If I had your eyesight, your knowledge and your pen, it would matter. But I haven't. Nevertheless I shall persist in my beastly attitude. Straight vision is bad form, - as you know. The proper thing is to look round the corner (of which he had accused Kipling), because, if Truth is not there, there is at any rate a something that distributes shekels and what better can you want but the noble metal.

Most of my life has been spent between sky and water and I live so alone that I often fancy myself clinging stupidly to a derelict planet abandoned by its precious crew. Your voice is not a voice in the wilderness, - it seems to come through the clean emptiness of space.

(To R.B. Cunninghame Graham, Aug. 5.1897, Aubry III, p. 207)

Conrad obviously considered the form of his writing as the immediate outcome of his vision. Nevertheless he tried to make his subject-matter more palatable to the ordinary reader in as far as its form was concerned. On the other hand however he refused to yield the least scrap of his convictions, even though he barred his way to popularity in that way. In spite of his material needs he did not primarily look for popularity. He rather felt, that the upholding of his convictions in honesty and sincerity was his foremost duty - that only in sticking to his particular 'turn of mind', could his integrity as an artist be upheld. No doubt he thought himself the very voice of truth, and his ultimate ambition aimed at nothing less than showing the world in its true aspect to his fellowmen. Of course his angles of vision, and through them his writings, changed in the course of his life. For that reason it is just as indispensable, in our view, to know Conrad the man as to know Conrad the writer, to consider his past, - the field and background of his writing -, as well as the convictions and beliefs he held whilst writing.

In his case the material situation, in as far as it has a bearing on his writing, must also be taken into account. In other words, we shall try to gain an impression of the main features of Conrad's personality, as well as of the material and spiritual situation in which his fiction was created. In that way only can we come to understand his truth, and its important influence on his methods of writing. Of course we shall respect the limits set by Conrad himself:

In a task which mainly consists in laying one's soul more or less bare to the world, a regard for decency, even at the cost of success, is but the regard for one's own dignity which is inseparably united with the dignity of one's work.

(A Personal Record, p. 14)

## CHAPTER I

### CONRAD THE MAN.

=====

Personality reveals itself through attitudes in the face of events and situations. Present and past behaviour, in psychology and literature, are taken as the expression of personality. They are the outcome of a man's mind and temperament, and of the formation these have received in the course of his life. The main formative elements which provide him with patterns of behaviour and expression, are education and experience, actual and spiritual. Education is based on the tradition and the religious and secular conventions of the community in which he grows up, and provides him with sets of values for the conduct of life. These are often changed and corrected, or even negated by experience, which is determined by the material and spiritual situation of his surroundings. Experience implies a constant adjustment of the acquired and inherited values to reality. As conveyed in a work of art by a sincere writer, it must therefore necessarily be an evaluation of life from the particular angle of the author, and, taken by itself, helps to explain this angle of evaluation to the critic.

#### 1. His Life and Experience.

In A Personal Record Conrad gives part of his life story in his usual, seemingly incoherent manner, which he calls 'discursive'. He states in that book that:

... the public record of these formative impressions is not the whim of an uneasy egotism' but is the 'voice of that inexorable past from which most of my work of fiction' is 'remotely derived'.

(p.24)



### Childhood.

Conrad's childhood tasted of dust and the grave. As one of the leaders of the abortive Polish rising of 1863, his father Nalecz Korzeniowski was exiled to Russia. His mother, submitting herself to the same punishment, followed him with the child Conrad, then but five years old. Soon, when Conrad was only seven, his mother broke down under the hardships of the exile, and his father, a doomed man already, was permitted to return to Poland, but only to die there. The boy Conrad was then only eleven, but this experience left an indelible mark upon his mind, although it can not, as some critics would have it, account in itself for Conrad's fatalistic temperament. Męgroz reports on a conversation with Conrad:

The death which took his father came as a release both to the ruined and disillusioned man and the imaginative boy, but its steady approach made an indelible impression on Conrad's mind of appalling feeling of inexorable fate, tangible, palpable.

(Męgroz, p. 52)

### Boyhood.

The boy who, from the first, breathed an atmosphere of inevitable failure and doom, found an outlet from this nightmare in a dream world which he created for himself from the reading of Captain Marryat, Fenimore Cooper, Victor Hugo, and numerous stories of exploration. They gave ample scope to his craving for glorious romantic adventure in a great world of light and freedom. Conrad states in an article that:

... perhaps no two other authors of fiction influenced so many lives and gave to so many the initial impulse towards a glorious or a useful career.

Through the distance of space and time those two men of another race have shaped also the life of the writer of this appreciation.

(Notes on Life A. Letters, Tales of the Sea, p. 56)

Ford Madox Hueffer states that Marryat's influence was 'profound and lifelong like the undertone of a song' and that 'Conrad looked at the world with the eyes of Jack Easy'. (p. 63)

In 'Geography and Some Explorers' Conrad tells us of his passion for 'map-gazing' and compares it with 'star-gazing':

And the honest maps of the nineteenth century nourished in me a passionate interest in the truth of geographical facts and a desire for precise knowledge which was extended later to other subjects. (p. 256)

The heart of its Africa was white and big (p. 257)

What those other subjects were is forecast in the following lines:

But map-gazing, to which I became addicted so early, brings the problems of the great spaces of the earth into stimulating and directing contact with some curiosity and gives an honest precision to one's imaginative faculty.

Regions unknown! My imagination could depict to itself there worthy, adventurous and devoted men, nibbling at the edges, attacking from north and south and east and west, conquering a bit of truth here and a bit of truth there, and swallowed up by the mystery their hearts were so persistently set on unveiling. (p. 256)

His longing to help to unveil the mystery of blank spaces (once he was a man), was then already intermingled with his desire to unravel the mystery, the SECRET OF HUMAN HEARTS. The first step was to be taken by Conrad the sailor, the second by Conrad the writer:

Not the least interesting part in the study of geographical discovery lies in the insight it gives one into the characters of that special kind of men who devoted the best part of their lives to the exploration of land and sea. In the world of mentality and imagination

which I was entering it was they and not the characters of famous fiction who were my first friends. (p. 257)

Of some of them I had soon formed for myself an image indissolubly connected with certain parts of the world. (p. 258)

He admired James Cook, 'whose only object was the search for truth... and not lucre and loot in some form or other' (p. 255), as was the case with the explorers of the Polar regions. He was fascinated by Livingstone and 'his heart's unappeased desire for the sources of the Nile', the great 'passion' which 'had changed him into a restless wanderer' and did not 'allow him to go home' (p. 258).

The boy's hunger for adventure was to turn up in the man's life in some form or other. Even at this age however, he does not only see but also imagines, and his imagination is an integral part of his experience filtered through his vision.

### Adolescence.

Largely as a result of his reading of books of adventure and exploration, books which fell on a fertile soil in the soul of a boy intimidated by the hopeless gloom of his nightmare surroundings, he decided to go to sea. At sixteen he went out in quest of the great adventures described in these books. In his recollections he ever presents his motives for this decisive step as a 'mysterious impulse':

Having broken away from my origin under a storm of blame from every quarter which had the merest shadow of a right to voice an opinion, removed by great distances from such natural affections as were still left to me, and even estranged, in a measure, from them by the totally unintelligible character of the life which had seduced me so mysteriously from my allegiance, I may safely say that through the blind force of circumstances the sea was to be all my world and the merchant service my only home for a long succession of years.

(A Personal Record, p. 11)

The 'mystery' of this impulse haunts his recollections and his fiction, and is even present in the life of such an utterly unimaginative and down-to-earth man as Captain MacWhirr.

Conrad felt later, that the decision to leave his country and the severing of all bonds of sympathy and loyalty for the sake of a vague dream, was in the nature of a desertion. He called it 'a fatuous and extravagant form of self-indulgence', and in a strangely twisted argument, - perhaps with the attempt at an excuse-, based it on 'love that may wear at times the desperate shape of betrayal'. At the same time however, he maintains that he never really gave up his loyalty towards his country, stating that 'the fidelity to a special tradition may last through the events of an unrelated existence, following faithfully, too, the traced way of an inexplicable impulse. (A Personal Record, pp. 35-36) Conrad was ever acutely aware of the fact that his existence was unrelated and rootless.

Edward Garnett states later:

Of himself Conrad spoke as a man lying under a slight stigma among his contemporaries for having expatriated himself. (Letters, p. X)

Perhaps as a result of this decision and its consequences there is a haunting sense of guilt and betrayal in Conrad's work. It is an obsession in his early work. The extent to which it may have influenced his fiction is shown by the fact that shortly before starting to write the story of Jim, - another one with a mysterious impulse of paramount importance -, he had been dealt with in an article in 'Kraj', which stated:

... que Joseph Conrad avait trahi la cause polonaise et n'était qu'un renégat.

(Elise Orzesko, 'L'Emigration des Talents, Kraj, 16, 28 avril 1899, Aubry I, p. 227)



But Conrad's choice soon turned out to be a pig in a poke. The great freedom for which he was longing turned out to be very problematic. According to his books, he expected the sea to be a stage for glorious deeds. ('Marryat knew nothing about the sea, it was a stage for him'). There, great opportunities lie waiting for those who have the courage to pick them up, the brave ones who are 'ready to face anything', as he tells us of Jim:

At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best part of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with a heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine filtre of unbounded confidence in itself. There was nothing he could not face.

(Lord Jim, p. 19)

2/ Conrad was evidently just as innocent in his endeavour as Cervantes (immortal hidalgo who, 'after reading so many romances, desired naively to escape with his very body from the intolerable reality of things'. (N.o.L.& L.) To some extent, Conrad's disguised self played the same part for a layer of fiction as Don Quixote. But his heroes lacked the latter's saving grace,- the innocence and simplicity of heart-, that sustained the merciful illusion throughout the hidalgo's life. Nobody but the farcical Russian in H.o.D. owns it in Conrad's fiction. His heroes, on the contrary, discover the real 'truth' about reality, and this is fatally and hopelessly at variance with the world of light literature.

Their lofty ideals of themselves soon crumble to pieces and they are left with the shambles of their dreams. Conrad was radically disenchanted by his experience, and left with sad regret profound disgust and overwhelming bitterness for the rest of his life. His disillusion was



brought about gradually, by a series of disappointments.

### Manhood.

The first stage of Conrad's sea-life had ended with a duel in an unhappy love-affair, and the loss of his ship in a gun-running adventure in the Carribean. He fled to England and went to sea in British sailing-ships, acquiring a Master's Certificate after many years of faithful service. He threw up his first command, as Aubry relates, probably in consequence of another love-affair in Mauritius. In 1915 he wrote to his compatriot Casimir Waliszewski referring to himself as a man 'qui n'a pas su mettre l'ordre et la continuité de sa vie à l'abri des impulsions, si bien qu'elle se présente parfois à lui comme une succession de trahisons'. (Aubry I, p. 230)

Many biographical elements in Lord Jim allow for the assumption that Conrad was speaking of his own experience, when relating Jim's past. Like Jim, he had run away from job after job, urged by the 'secret impulse'. Like him, Conrad was hurt by a falling spar, had to stay in a hospital in the east, and for years spent a leisurely life as an officer on a steamer in the Malay Archipelago. In Jim, after a 'course of light holiday literature, the vocation for the sea had declared itself'. He would:

... forget himself and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature', he 'regarded his fellowmen with the contempt of a man destined to shine in the midst of ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half-naked, waiting on uncovered reefs in search of shell-fish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men - always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book. (pp. 5-8)

→ of dangers'. He 'saw himself saving people from sinking

'But entering the region so well known to his imagination found them strangely barren of adventure. He made many voyages. He knew the magic monotony of existence between sky and water, he had to bear the criticism of men, the exactions of the sea, and the prosaic severity of the daily task that gives bread - but whose only reward is in the perfect love of the work. This reward eluded him. Yet he could not go back, because there is nothing more enticing, disenchanting and enslaving than the life at sea.

Marlow states in Lord Jim:

There is such a magnificent vagueness in the expectations that had driven each of us to sea, such a glorious indefiniteness, such a beautiful greed of adventures that are their own and only reward! What we get - well, we won't talk of that; but can one of us restrain a smile? In no other kind of life is the illusion more wide of reality - in no other is the beginning all illusion - the subjugation more complete. Hadn't we all commenced with the same desire, ended with the same knowledge, carried the memory of the same cherished glamour through the sordid days of imprecation?

(Lord Jim, p. 94)

In Chance he comments on young Powell:

I suppose that to him life, not so much perhaps his own as that of others, was something still in the nature of a fairy-tale with a 'they lived happy ever after' termination. We are the creatures of our light literature much more than is generally suspected... (p. 288)

Marlow constantly stresses the fact that Jim thought himself a 'hero in a book' and looked at the world from this angle (Lord Jim, pp. 4, 5, 171, 191).

In A Mirror of the Sea Conrad recalls the moment when, on coming across the waterlogged hull of a wrecked ship in the Atlantic, they just managed to save the crew before the ship sank. All the relentless cruelty of the elements and their cold unconcern in the face of human suffering then stood revealed to him, and he drew the conclusion, that for his survival, man had to be 'strong strong and nothing but strong!'. .

The dreams of his boyhood turn up again when he tries to join whalers which sail into Arctic waters, or when he reports that 'he has been permitted to sail through the very heart of the old Pacific Mystery' (Last Essays, p. 26) (taking, as shipmaster, the sailing-ship 'Otago' from Sydney to Mauritius by way of Torres Strait, then an unknown route). He found the wrecks of two ships on his way.

The final disenchantment and turning point of Conrad's life occurred at a place which was the symbol of his most excessively romantic hope. As a reading of A Personal Record and 'Geography and Some Explorers' proves, Marlow spoke for Conrad, when saying in Heart of Darkness:

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting I would put my finger on it and say. When I grow up I will go there .. There was one .. - the biggest, the most blank so to speak ... (p. 59)

It was in 1868, when nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent, I said to myself with absolute assurance and an amazing audacity which are no longer in my character now:

'When I grow up I shall go there.'

And of course I thought no more about it till after a quarter of a century or so an opportunity offered to go there - as if the sin of childish audacity was to be visited on my mature head. Yes. I did go there!

(A Personal Record, p. 40)

This idea of the fatality of our impulses haunts the whole of Conrad's work and is outspoken in Lord Jim:

The story of the last events you shall find in the few pages enclosed here. You must admit that it is romantic beyond the wildest dreams of his boyhood, and yet there is to my mind a sort of profound and terrifying logic in it, as if it were our imagination alone that could set loose upon us the might of an overwhelming destiny. The imprudence of our thoughts recoils upon our heads; who toys with the sword shall perish by the sword (p.252)

Conrad further comments on that spot in Africa, where he found a river coiled like a snake, - a 'devil-god' for the savages:

It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery - a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness.

(Heart of Darkness, p.59)

The 'truth' he found was 'the distasteful knowledge of the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration:

(Last Essays, p. 25)

It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me - and into my thoughts.

(Heart of Darkness, p. 58)

Here then, in the very heart of Africa, Conrad received the revelation of his sinister 'truth'. It was such as to make him collapse physically and mentally, leaving an abiding mark on his soul. It released the darkest side of his nature. In the Congo, Conrad's romantic ideal of himself and the world was stabbed to the very heart. The rest of his days were spent in sadly brooding over the irreparable loss of this dream. It never died completely, and hence Conrad's strangely ambiguous attitude towards life, - his romantic approach on the one hand, and his fierce resentment and indiction of anything romantic on the other hand, - his wonder and awe at the spectacle of life, and, at the same time, his craving to justify an attitude of indifference resignation and bitter contempt. Hence his fierce resentment of free invention in fiction, his demand for absolute truthfulness of sensation, - perhaps springing from his forced belief in the futility of things -, his inertia of invention and his inability to describe light adventure. The sea, the world, the ships and the men in them, all were hopelessly at variance with Conrad's ideals,



and he never really forgave the world for the fact that it was not what he had imagined it to be. He was bitter and offended, and this culminating experience put a final stamp on his values and was further stressed by his experience as a writer.

Referring to Marryat later Conrad called certain aspects of the latter's work 'primitive and childish', his morality 'honourable and conventional', the whole of his work 'a priceless legend', his sentimentality 'factitious'. His characters are 'all surface' and 'do not belong to life'. Nevertheless he admires his 'rapidity of action', and the qualities of 'headlong, reckless audacity, an intimacy with violence, an unthinking fearlessness, and an exuberance of vitality'. (Notes on Life and Letters, p. 64) All such qualities are non-existent in Conrad's work. His adventurers, who possess them, are invariably foolish and absurd. Almost all of them fail. Conrad was an adventurer without an adventurer's heart. Fundamentally he was not made of the stuff that is fit to stand the anarchy and strain of an 'unrelated existence', living on the outskirts of a stable society 'without the amenities that make life lovable and gentle', being exposed instead to the winds of heaven and to the wiles of man. 'J'ai jeté ma vie à tous les vents du ciel', he writes to Cunninghame Graham (Aubrey I, p. 296, Feb. 8.99). The same lot was dealt to him in his writing life and galled it in the same way, strengthening the fundamental mood of doom and failure, which was so far the outcome of his experience.

Conrad's decision to cast off the bonds of the sea and to leave the community of ships and men was but another step in the 'series of betrayals', caused by another 'mysterious impulse'.



In Almayer's Folly he connects the impulse of going to sea with his decision to become a writer:

I do not know which of the two impulses has appeared more mysterious and more wonderful to me. Still, in writing, as in going to sea, I had to wait my opportunity. (p.43)

And he was urged by the same feeling:

Leaves must follow upon each other as leagues used to follow in the days gone by, on and on to the appointed end, which, being Truth itself, is One - one for all men and for all occupations. (p.49)

Although he does not seem to think much of Providence, he would have it that its hand seemed to be in play to make the 'culminating experience' of his life at sea the starting-point of his writing life, creating the 'opportunity'. Relating to his Congo experience he writes:

And of course I thought no more about it till after a quarter of a century or so an opportunity offered to go there - as if the sin of childish audacity was to be visited on my mature head. Yes. I did go there: There being the region of Stanley Falls which in '68 was the blankest of blankspaces on the earth's figured surface. And the MS of 'Almayer's Folly' carried about me as if it were a talisman or a treasure, went there too.

That it ever came out of there seems a special dispensation of Providence; because a good many of my other properties, infinitely more valuable and useful to me, remained behind through unfortunate accidents of transportation.

(A Personal Record, p. 40)

Conrad then enumerates a number of occasions, on which the MS could have been lost as easily as when he passed an awful turn in the Congo at night in a half-manned canoe.

Whether led by Providence or not, Conrad, not long after his Congo-adventure transferred his explorations, - his craving for 'truth' - from the decks of ships into another field. This time he was not out for the mystery of blank spaces on charts, but for the mystery of the black spots in men's hearts, which could explain his most personal failures.

When Conrad had exchanged the open spaces of the sea for the narrow limited space of his writing-desk, the hold of an active life on his brooding nature was no longer there. Brooding was now his vocation. But his new occupation, whatever Conrad may have expected from it, proved, like his decision to go to sea, to be a white elephant. In The Secret Agent he writes about the Assistant Commissioner, who can be seen as a reflection of Conrad the writer:

No man engaged in a work he does not like can preserve many saving illusions about himself. The distaste, the absence of glamour, extend from the occupation to the personality. (p.112)

His .. real abilities .. were combined with an adventurous disposition. Chained to a desk in the thick of four million men, he considered himself the victim of an ironic fate. (p.113)

.. the instinct of self-preservation was strong within him...

Conrad's convictions received their ultimate shape in the course of his writing-life. On several occasions, he compares it with life at sea, and finds that both are exacting vocations, struggles 'in complete isolation without the amenities that make life lovable and gentle', with no adequate reward but the love for them. This eluded him in both.

We shall not here dwell on the almost insurmountable difficulties which assailed him from all sides. We know that his health was permanently undermined after his Congo-adventure. His imagination was arid. For more than a decade, success eludes him, and he was almost crushed by doubts about his own work. He had a family to keep and achieved no more than running hopelessly into debt. The man of action was stuck to his desk once and for all, suffering agonies of inertia and impotence in complete seclusion, feeling hopelessly inadequate for his task, imagining

himself to be a man buried in a grave, unable to move and gradually being stifled under a tremendous burden; thinking himself in empty space, separated by worlds from his kind; being unable to find a single word, to compose a single sentence; breaking down for weeks, and - his right hand being paralysed-, being also physically incapable of writing. He compared his situation with hell. All this could but help to strengthen the melancholic and gloomy strain in his nature, make his fundamental mood of doom and failure a permanent 'sentiment of existence', and paralyze his power of writing. He had to make tremendous efforts to drag himself up from the depths of despair. The immobility of the characters in his fiction, the deadening, glassy distance of action and its agonisingly slow progress may to a great extent be due to this situation. It also helps to explain the general feeling of stillness inertia and paralysis, as well as the infernal twilight, which pervades his work, and the struggles of will and passion in utter darkness. It accounts partly for his craving to discover the very source of the mysterious impulse which drives men into such situations. It helped to create his haunting awareness of infernal powers looming over human existence, his obsession with failure guilt and death, -which tinges the very aspect of the surrounding world-, of dangers lurking every where and of monstrous horrors flinging out their arms and setting traps to seize the human victim and crush him. It seems to justify his conception of man as a lonely, wandering and tormented thing, caught up in the meshes of a cruel machine, the universe. It explains Conrad's revolt against this pitiful state of fallen man and a fallen universe, the tremendous outcry which never comes through but is always trembling on the verge of expression - and outcry for justice, pity and redeeming love.

It was not until he had found a materially safe foothold in life that Conrad could gain some relief from his haunting obsessions and 'get out of himself' in his fiction. It might only be in his last novels, that he finds the way out of the twilight of his nightmares into the broad light of the day. At the same time however, the source of his creative unrest had dried up.

Evidently Conrad had to pay heavily for his 'freedom'. The world turned out to be a monstrously unsafe place, where men without ties and support such as him, were thrown exclusively on their own 'inborn strength' to keep alive.



## 2. His Mind and Temperament.

Conrad comments on Captain Marlow:

The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer too ...

Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted) ...

(Heart of Darkness, p. 54)

Marlow truly seems but a sailor in disguise. His mind is subtle and finely discriminating in matters of feeling. He is so sensitive and such a masterly observer and storyteller, that in the part of the active sailor he seems misplaced; in fact, he mostly does not appear as such, but ultimately remains a mere showman, with a pointer in his hand, before the stage he conjures up before our eyes. Seemingly aimless, he seems to have roamed the seas for the sole purpose of being able to sit now and share his treasure of melancholic and strange experience with us, tingeing it with his gloomy insight and watering its drama down by the distance in which he keeps it.

Approximately the same as Conrad said of Marlow was said about Conrad by contemporaries (Sir David Bone, Mégroz etc). Jean Aubry quotes a description from Conrad's late seagoing days:

Ce qui, en dehors de la distinction de ses manières frappait le plus dans le capitaine de l'Otago, c'était le contraste qu'il formait avec les autres patrons de navires...

Or ces patrons de navire ... le langage énergique et souvent grossier, n'étaient pas des modèles d'élégance et de raffinement. Au contraire de ses collègues, le capitaine Korzeniowski était toujours vêtu comme un petit-maitre ... et d'une grande élégance.



.. il contrastait avec les autres capitaines avec lesquels il n'avait, au rest, que des relations de stricte politesse ... Aussi était-il très peu populaire parmi ses collègues qui l'appelaient ironiquement 'the Russian Count'.

(Aubry I, pp. 133-134)

The same contemporary offers a description which shows up Conrad's characteristics from outside:

Des traits énergiques et d'une extrême mobilité, passant très rapidement de la douceur à une nervosité confinant à la colère: de grands yeux noirs généralement mélancoliques et rêveurs, doux aussi en dehors des moments assez fréquents d'agacement ...

(Aubry I, p. 133)

John Galsworthy writes:

It was in March 1893 that I first met Conrad on board the English sailing ship 'Torrens' in Adelaide Harbour. He was superintending the stowage of cargo. Very dark he looked in the burning sunlight - tanned, with a peaked brown beard, almost black hair, and dark brown eyes, over which the lids were deeply folded. He was thin, not tall, his arms very long, his shoulders broad, his head set rather forward. He spoke to me with a strong foreign accent. He seemed to me strange on an English ship...

He was a good seaman, watchful of the weather, quick in handling the ship; considerate with the apprentices... With the crew he was popular: they were individuals to him, not a mere gang ...

Ever the great teller of a tale, he had already nearly twenty years of tales to tell. Tales of ships and storms, of Polish revolution, of his youthful Carlist gun-running adventure, of the Malay seas, and the Congo ...

I remember feeling that he outweighed for me all the other experiences of that voyage. Fascination was Conrad's greatest characteristic - the fascination of vivid expressiveness and zest, of his deeply affectionate heart, and his far-ranging, subtle mind. He was extraordinarily perceptive and receptive.

(A Conrad Reader, p.12)

Garnett gives a picture of Conrad newly-ashore:

My memory of seeing a dark-haired man, short but extremely graceful in his nervous gestures, with brilliant eyes, now narrowed and penetrating, now soft and warm, with a manner alert yet caressing, whose speech was in-

gratifying, guarded, and brusque turn by turn. I had never seen before a man so masculinely keen yet so femininely sensitive...

Garnett tells us further that 'this stranger charmed him by something polished and fastidious in the inflexions of his manner' and gives a precise characterisation which confirms the observation quoted above:

There was a blend of caressing, almost feminine intimacy with masculine incisiveness in his talk; it was that which gave it its special character.

(Letters, pp. X - XII)

Garnett proffers the view that, inherited from father and mother, there were two natures interwoven in Conrad. The one was 'feminine, affectionate, responsive, clear-eyed', and the other 'masculine, formidably critical, fiercely ironical, dominating, intransigent'. If we add Galsworthy's statement that Conrad was 'extremely receptive and perceptive' we can, in a general conclusion, attribute to Conrad's mind the qualities of extraordinary sensibility, of distinction and general sympathy. On the other hand his mind had a distinctly ironic cast. - These qualities are, in a sailor, to say the least, rare.

Tadeusz Bobrowski, Conrad's uncle and guardian, was the only person in the world who occasionally kept a protecting hand over the orphan. He was ever ready with practical or spiritual advice. After the disastrous Congo-adventure, when Conrad had collapsed physically and mentally, he cried out in despair:

Moi je suis encore plongé dans la nuit la plus épaisse et mes rêves ne sont que cauchemars ...

(A Mme Poradowska, mai 1891, Aubry I, p. 172)

At that moment, in a letter of exhortation, his uncle struck the fundamental note of Conrad's temperament, -revealing for the latter's nature and the nature of his work:

... je devrais commencer par 'my dear pessimist', car c'est l'odeur que répandent tes lettres depuis quelque temps et c'est la dénomination qui te convient le mieux.

Après mûre réflexion sur les causes de ton pessimisme je ne peux les attribuer ni à la vieillesse, quand on a trente ans et une vie si occupée que tu en as une. Il faut bien que je mette cela sur le compte de la maladie, et j'y suis conduit, après la pénible aventure de ton expédition africaine et la grave maladie qu'en a été la conséquence et pendant laquelle tu as eu beaucoup de temps pour méditer et pour te livrer à une chose observée par moi, qui appartient à la constitution même de ton caractère et que tu as héritée aussi de tes parents: la rêvasserie, malgré ton métier très pratique.

Peut-être me trompe-je, mais je crois que ce caractère pessimiste existait déjà en toi il y a des années; quand tu étais à Marseille; mais il se trouvait alors sur un fond de jeunesse. Cela me convainc qu'avec ta nature mélancolique, tu devrais éviter toutes ces méditations qui t'amènent à des conclusions pessimistes. Je te conseille de t'adonner davantage à la vie active.

(Aubry I, p.175, lettre de Thadée Bobrowski, 9.Nov.1891)

.. défaut qui te vient des Nalecz Korzeniowski. Ton grand-père et ton oncle étaient toujours plongés dans des projets d'ordre pratique, mais qui n'existaient que dans leur imagination. Ton père était un rêveur idéaliste... Tous trois ils avaient beaucoup d'amour propre et souffraient vivement de leurs succès. Dans des projets tu te laisse malheureusement emporter par ton imagination, et quand ils échouent, tu t'abandonnes à un découragement par trop extrême.

(Aubry I, p. 174, 30 juillet, 1891)

This makes it apparent that all Conrad's experience, from childhood to manhood, however important in itself, only served to develop a prevalent disposition in him to the full.

Probably on the strength of these lines, Aubry contends in reply to Galsworthy (Reminiscences of Conrad) who held that the 'lingering Congo fever which dogged his health fastened a deep, fitful gloom over his spirit':

This gloom was at the bottom of his nature, he had taken it in with his first breath, and the contact with different countries, and the solitude of the sea had only deepened it. But though it did not actually fasten this deep gloom on his spirit yet the Congo certainly caused it to rise up from the depths of his soul, and this no doubt contributed to those deep currents of bitterness which seem to well out like a great river from the very heart of human darkness and carry to the confines of the land of dreams the strength of an unquiet spirit and a generous mind.

(Aubry I, p. 143)

But we shall not forget that, balancing his disillusion there was another side to Conrad's nature. It was, as a vital zest for life, ever present in his work, opposing disenchantment and resignation. Aubry states (p.174):

There was ever a store of energy in him which had, as we have seen, its roots in an unhappy childhood. An active life was his salvation, the one escape possible to a man of his temperament.

Aubry further speaks of 'that inborn melancholy and energetic despair which underlie his work and which twenty hard, adventurous years had kept beneath the surface'.

When Conrad had exchanged the open spaces of the sea for the narrowly limited space of his writing-desk, this hold was no longer there.



## CHAPTER II.

### 1. THE TURN OF MIND.

Conrad saw the world with 'new' eyes. He came as a stranger to the life of his choice, - the life at sea and the life of fiction -, and to the language of his choice. His eyes were undimmed by the conventions in both which tend to force those follow/ing them, to walk a trodden path. Joseph de Smet has enumerated some of the factors which make Conrad's approach to his subject-matter so startling:

Trois particularités propres à Joseph Conrad se présentent à notre esprit:

(1) D'abord la vie qu'il a vécue avant d'écrire, celle où c'est formée sa pensée, sa vision, son imagination, la vie du marin était totalement étrangère à sa race, à ses instincts héréditaires. Il l'a vécue avec une âme toute neuve et des sensibilités que rien n'avait émoussées. Je ne peut point parler ici de la fameuse âme slave dont on a tant abusé - et dont on s'est tant amusé - et de laquelle je ne connais rien.

(2) En second lieu, le langage dont il s'est servi, l'instrument de son art, il l'a conquis, il s'en est rendu maître non pas dans son première enfance, à l'âge où toutes les formules - les phrases toutes faites et les banalités courantes nous sont imposées sans que nous puissions nous en défendre, mais lorsqu'il était pleinement conscient, sûr de lui et maître d'en faire en pleine indépendance un instrument approprié à ses desseins.

(3) En troisième lieu, il n'a commencé à écrire que lorsque sa pensée était mûrie, après un long stage, une préparation pleine de prudence et d'hésitation qui lui prit cinq années de sa vie et ne se termina qu'à l'âge de trente sept ans.

(Mercure de France, Tome XCVII., Mai-Juin 1912, Paris 1912, Joseph de Smet, Joseph Conrad)

Conrad's turn of mind, through his original and straight approach, presents us with a new and startling vision of life, which gives his work the indelible stamp of true art. He strives to make it come to us through a



moral shock. The reality known to us is, in his creative imagination, not enriched in its aspects, but completely remoulded to a universe which lay beyond the reach of our consciousness before. Certain facts which formed part of our view of life and the world, suddenly shift to its very centre in Conrad's view, and every single detail points in their direction, to the exclusion of all aspects of reality foreign to them.

✓ Edward Garnett speaks of the 'impetuosity' of his prejudiced judgments (L.fr.C., p.XV), and Conrad himself was aware that certain tenets of his were immovably fixed in his mind:

Some critics have found fault with me for not constantly being myself. But they are wrong. I am always myself. I am a man of formed character. Certain conclusions remain immovably fixed in my mind, but I am no slave to prejudices and formulas, and I shall never be. My attitude to subjects and impressions, the angles of vision, my methods of composition will, within limits, be always changing - not because I am unstable or unprincipled but because I am free.

(Aubrey II, p. 204, to Barrett H. Clark, May 4, 1918)

This is evidently a reply to a reproach which was often levelled against Conrad's fiction. E.M. Forster speaks of 'opinions and the right to throw them overboard when facts make them look absurd', of something 'obscure, obscure!'. He suspects 'that the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel'. (The Great Tradition, p.173) This is true in as far as Conrad invariably stresses the coming of darkness after the great moral shock, the fact of being lost in darkness and at a complete loss as to the contradictions of existence, to which he does not offer any answer because he has none himself. It is his very aim to produce this effect in the reader.

Joseph de Smet comments on this aspect of his art:

Néanmoins ses théories, lorsqu'il se laisse aller à les indiquer, restent vagues, difficiles à saisir et pas toujours strictement conciliables entre elles. Et cela provient manifestement de ce qu'il cherche à les définir d'après son art dans les limites arrêtées a priori, en quoi il a raison. (p. 63)

The first obstacle then which makes it difficult to get at the core of Conrad's central notions is the fact that he did of set purpose, not want to be explicit. Explaining, for the writer of fiction, means to 'give himself away'. Fortunately he did this before he had learnt all the rules of his craft, and we have his word that his convictions did not change much in the course of his writing. For explicit manifestations we have therefore to turn to his early work, - although it is inferior as compared with his later work-.

Secondly, his beliefs were essentially a negation of the values which were generally accepted in his time and still are largely so nowadays. Considering their frank statement in his letters we shall see that he toned them down cautiously before exposing them to the public eye, hoping all the same to be understood by those who could 'see'. That may also partly explain why he abstained from taking a definite stand. He considered those current values as the cause of much suffering in the history of mankind, but had no coherent system of thought to offer as a substitute for what he was intent on destroying. They turn up permanently in the form of a destructive mist or cloud, under which his heroes go out, and they form part of their dream. Intent on destroying hallowed rules of conduct, he offered but vague notions to compensate for them. Even those he doubted with his sarcasm. In Jim e.g. he explicitly leaves it to the reader to interpret the facts for himself, and refrains from

taking a stand. His primary aim is to reveal life, by means of a great shock, as monstrously unsafe, its 'paths separated by chasms', to make us see that it is impossible to resolve the question of right and wrong through given manners of conduct. There is always the suspicion that his work is the reflection of his own bewilderment in the face of existence, that its unintelligibility is its very truth, and that Conrad cannot give a definite answer to its problem because he has none. The contrast reflection-action e-g. runs through the whole of his work from *Almayer* to *Heyst* and leaves but a question-mark.

This leads us to the third point, namely that the convictions which he consciously formulates and wants to set forth in his work are different from those we can crystallise out of it. In other words, his conscious intention seems to be different at times from his creative achievement.

Beyond Conrad's inherited temperamental qualities, beyond his original approach to the life and the language of his choice, beyond the fact that his character was already formed when he started to write, -beyond all these personal factors there were, -through his experience-, extraneous forces influencing his appreciation of life. They were the outcome of the spiritual situation of his time. In spite of his contention that he was 'acutely conscious of being neither the interpreter in any profound sense of his own epoch nor a magician evoker of the past either in its spirit or its form', he was subjected to the influence of forces which were beyond the pale of his conscious assessment. He realised their influence in the work of Captain Marryat, which he calls a 'historical document', and holds that 'it is absolutely amazing to us, as the disclosure of the spirit animating the stirring times when the nineteenth century was young'. His scorn

for the reality of Marryat's fiction shows how far he was away from its spirit. In the letter referred to above he states that he 'often suffered in connection with his work from a sense of unreality, from intellectual doubt of the ground he stood upon'. (to (Sir) Edmund Gosse, Aubry II, p.14) That is the very condition of the existence he evokes in his books. As such his work is a document of our time. Douglas Hewitt in his study holds that 'Conrad does, indeed, often seem to be unaware of what qualities make him a great novelist'. (p.3) Conrad concedes that much when writing to Charles Chassé:

That is the truth as far as I know. Mais après tout, vous pouvez avoir raison. Men have but very little self-knowledge, and authors especially are victims of many illusions about themselves.

(21st Jan., 1924, Aubry II)

Conrad's attitude to Christian thought provides a typical example of the discrepancy<sup>of</sup> conscious negation and creative affirmation in his work. He discards with religion and Christianity. Nevertheless the central happening of his fiction is often rendered in Biblical and religious terms. The core of things is shown to be an endless universal struggle of merely spiritual significance, between light and darkness, between devil and angel. It is a constant allegorical repetition of the fall of man under the pressure of spiritual forces. Those terms show the whole of creation to be afflicted with a terrible curse, -evil-, and they create an aura of solemnity and significance. The surface facts of human existence become completely insignificant under their crushing weight, and as such these terms form an irreplaceable layer of meaning without which Conrad's work is unthinkable. Conrad, with his excessive conscientiousness as to the use of the 'right' word, used them, no doubt, intentionally.



It is impossible to take them as a mere poetical adornment, a mere enrichment of style, and yet he declares in the preface to 'The Shadow Line':

..all my moral and intellectual being is penetrated by an invincible conviction that whatever falls under the dominion of our senses must be in nature and, however exceptional, cannot differ in its essence from all the other effects of the visible and tangible world of which we are a self-conscious part. The world of the living contains enough mysteries and marvels as it is; marvels and mysteries acting upon our emotions and intelligence in ways so inexplicable that it would almost justify the conception of life as an enchanted state.

He refuses 'to seek help from those vain imaginings common to all ages and that in themselves are enough to fill all lovers of mankind with unutterable sadness.

As to the effect of a mental or moral shock on a common mind, that is quite a legitimate subject for study and description.

And yet the 'world of the living' does not approximately yield sufficient denominations of visible and tangible things for the rendering of Conrad's truth. A 'soul' is not visible and tangible, and yet it is a central conception. Conrad's early fiction even suffered from abundance of such intangible things. They are quite clearly attributes and conceptions used by the narrator, in an objective manner, and not seen through the eyes of the victim of a moral shock, -unless this is Conrad himself. The implications of eternity are clearly not a form of the illusory reaction of the victim of a mental shock, but an integral part of Conrad's vision.

It is perhaps this aspect of Conrad's fiction which led E.M. Forster to think that Conrad's 'opinions' are 'held under the semblance of eternity, girt with the sea, crowned with stars, and therefore easily mistaken for a creed'. (The Great Tradition, p. 173)



F.R. Leavis has accused Conrad of having 'a simple soul in some respects' (The Great Tradition, p.182). We know that Conrad had suffered a series of moral shocks in his life. His Congo-experience was the most disastrous one, and Conrad's connecting the origin of his writing life with it makes it plain that it gave him the lasting creative impulse, determining his use of the story as a creative medium once and for all. A great moral shock is the motive centre of all his tales and novels, and he aims at conveying it to the reader. In form and content, the story is for him the means of conveying a moral discovery. The fatal moral shock is mostly suffered by one human being, the man at the heart of the tale, or by a community, standing for the different forces of the human soul. Its cause is mostly a fantastic betrayal, not grave perhaps in a legal sense, but in human and spiritual terms. It is, for the life of the individual, of decisive influence. It seems to be brought about by chance, and evidently aims at its victim with a malevolent cunning, exploiting all circumstances of a situation.

In his last few books, it becomes more of a side-issue in the general run of action, like the tragic theme in Shakespeare's Romantic Tragedies. Their solution seems equally melodramatic. In the same degree, as the strength of this source of inspiration fades away, the value of Conrad's creative achievement decreases. The central theme, around which Conrad's creative effort revolves unceasingly, is the temptation of a human soul, the surrender of will to its passion, agonising self-torture and regret after the hideous act is committed, and finally a sordid death. The magnetic centre, which draws all scraps of the narrative into its direction, is the SECRET OF HEARTS, the obsession to enlighten the mystery of the treacherous impulses which inevitably lead man to his doom, and the greater mystery which makes him destroy himself in vain remorse. All Conrad's books are studies in this subject as much as they are illustrations.

Joseph de Smet comments on this central aspect:(p.62)

Toujours le mystère de l'énigme que chaque être humain porte en lui le préoccupe.

Peut d'écrivains ont réussi à nous faire sentir la pesée d'une destinée implacable sur une existence humaine; s'est le don des forts. Conrad a prouvé qu'il l'a.

This is Conrad's peculiar 'turn of mind', which not only sheds a sort of lurid light over his universe, but makes it an agent in the strife displayed. The fall and disintegration of a human soul takes place against a vast background which takes active part in its struggle. Ultimately the eyes of the man in front of us are made to perceive the same thing happening all round him throughout the visible world, -and this should also hold for the reader.

1. Choice of Subject-matter.

The realm of imagination seemed to Conrad a far more dangerous element than the sea. In order to steer clear of its fathomless depths, he was 'intent on keeping hold on the one thing really his', his life and experience. Lacking inventive power, he was forced to resort to his own past as his source of writing-material. Having spent the decisive part of his life at sea, this became the main stage in his fiction. The land for him was but a coastline, and in his fiction he did not often venture much further inland than the seaboard - even his great novel Nostromo is but 'A Tale of the Seaboard'. Having no home to turn to between voyages, ships became his home. The only companions of his lonely and wandering life were men of the sea, who never remained long in one ship. His knowledge of the east was but a series of fleeting contacts in harbours. Having limited himself to what his imagination could make of his experience, he found his subject-matter inadequate and barren, in view of his primary aim of writing, -the revelation of the mystery of human hearts-. Moreover, in Conrad's day, the sea was still, to the general reader, the scene par excellence for light adventure, whereas his fiction is a fierce indiction of this. Writing to R.Curle he talks of :

.. an opportunity for me to get freed from that infernal tail of ships, and that obsession of my sea life which has about as much bearing on my literary existence, on my quality as a writer, as the enumeration of drawing-rooms which Thackeray frequented could have had on his gift as a great novelist. After all, I may have been a seaman, but I am a writer of prose. Indeed, the nature of my writings runs the risk of being obscured by the nature of my material. I admit it is natural; but only the

appreciation of a special personal intelligence can counteract the superficial appreciation of the inferior intelligence of the mass of readers and critics.

(Aubry II, 14th July, 1923, p.316)

Although yielding but poor material for Conrad's particular aim, the presentation of life at sea offered a great advantage :

But the problem that faces them is not a problem of the sea, it is merely a problem that has arisen on board a ship where the conditions of complete isolation from all land entanglements make it stand out with particular force and colouring.

(To F.N. Doubleday, 7th Feb., 1924, Aubry II, p.342)

In the Preface to 'Within the Tides' he remarks :

A reviewer observed that I liked to write of men who go to sea or live on lonely islands untrammelled by the pressure of wordly circumstances, because such characters are allowed freer play to my imagination which in their case was only bounded by natural laws and the universal human conventions. There is a certain truth in this remark no doubt. It is only the suggestion of deliberate choice that misses its mark. If have not sought for special imaginative freedom or a larger play of fancy in my choice of characters and subjects. The nature of the knowledge, suggestion or hints used in my imaginative work has depended directly on the conditions of my active life. It depended more on contacts, and very slight contacts at that, than on actual experience; because my life was far from being adventurous in itself.

This amounts to saying that Conrad's particular subject-matter was literally forced on him. He had to show men on the fringe of society, in 'exotic' settings -against an elementary background-, confronted in lonely isolation by the wilderness or the sea. In the 'Mirror' he comments on the same subject :

... the origin of my literary work was far from giving a large scope to my imagination. On the contrary, the mere fact of dealing with matters outside the general run of everyday experience laid me under the obligation of a mere scrupulous fidelity to the truth of my sensations. The problem was to make unfamiliar things credible. To do that I had to create for them, to envelop them in their proper atmosphere of actuality. This was the hardest task of all and the most important, in view of that conscientious rendering of truth in thought and fact which has been always my aim.

(p.154)

As to his selection he comments that

... the effect of perspective in memory is to make things loom large because the essentials stand out isolated from their surroundings of insignificant daily facts which have naturally faded out of one's mind.

(p.154)

The great majority of Conrad's characters are men of the sea, and in some way or other projections of Conrad's self. There are his favourites and heroes, -those who are akin to him and always remain strangers to the sea at heart-. Their senior is Marlow. Invariably connected with them is another group, -those who are at home on the sea, its children, presenting its true spirit-, the Singletons, MacWhirrs, 'Allistouns etc. The first group are mostly young incarnations of the troubles at Conrad's heart, and rather wandering adventurers than men of the sea-, though brought up in its tradition and service. Opposed to their seniors, -the old generation of the sailing ships, strong and spotless captains and patriarchs-, are the devils and tempters, creatures of the present steamship-generation, who oppose the 'spirit'. Finally there are the projections of the writing man : men of sensation, wanderers with sceptical hearts, mere onlookers with the sole aim of



registering the spectacle and keeping aloof and detached from it.

Conrad admires the strong captains and loathes the steamship-devils - heralds of the new time-, but his heart goes out to the victims, the negative heroes. 'C'est à travers son destin que Flaubert a vu les destins des autres existences' comments the French critic Paul Bourget (Oeuvres Complètes, I, Paris, 1899, p.111), and we can give the same explanation for Conrad's choice of character. Marlow explains his affection for Jim :

Hadn't we all commenced with the same desire,  
ended with the same knowledge, carried the memory  
of the same cherished glamour through the sordid  
days of imprecation. (p.129)

It is the romantic dream of some exalted destiny for themselves, and its terrible and complete disenchantment, which is the most fascinating facet of Conrad's heroes. Their hate of the bitter reality, and their stubborn love for the futile dream is their central ambiguity, -the incurable rift which has cleft them in two.

In his recollections of the complex sensations which had moved him to take up his pen and to start writing his first book, Conrad tells us distinctly which aspects of the persons he met fascinated him and set his imagination to work. (A Personal Record)

We meet the ridiculously pathetic figure of Almayer, clad in glaring pygamas. He is standing in the chilly misty morning air on a jetty by some Malay river on the edge of the jungle, brooding distractedly over his

lost dream. He evolves fantastic plans to overcome the fatal destiny which has stranded him in the wilderness, far from his kind. Completely absorbed in himself, he is probably contemplating another fantastic move which is hopelessly out of key with the reality of his surroundings, like the one which brought Conrad and the ship up-river. He has ordered a pony, a 'grandiose' and mad enterprise, since the animal has not much chance of living in the small clearing with the few decaying huts in the jungle. The pony is lowered down to him, but, as he is too deeply absorbed in the contemplation of his lofty dream, his hand is too weak to hold it. He gets a violent kick, and the pony disappears into the fog, into the direction of Almayer's decaying bungalow. 'That man did not understand his opportunities', (p.166) Almayer finds himself on the ground, but as soon as he has risen, his thoughts have switched to some other idea, and he does not make the least effort to recapture the pony. In the distance, a white cloud seems to move in the fog - a flock of geese - 'the only geese on the east coast', of which Almayer is the proud owner. There are scornful remarks and sniggers and much laughter about him and his dreams, all along the coast, even amongst the natives. Now he wants to see the captain who, in the middle of his morning shave, agrees, with a disdainful smile. We learn that Almayer's great hope is now set on some 'very important interests somewhere in the interior', which we can by now assume, from his general fantastic aspect and the tone in which he is talked about, to be mere illusions and existing only in his crazy imagination, -as do the rest of his 'great' projects-. He was to be the first hero of Conrad's fiction.

It is this pathetic air of failure and doom which fascinates and moves Conrad first of all in his characters, with the contrasting exceptions shown above. What is remarkable in this episode in comparison to the book, just as the comparison of the 'Tremolino' episode from the Mirror with the 'Arrow of Gold', is its ordinary and sane daylight vision in contrast to the feverish nightmare-settings in his fiction.

In the universe Conrad created for his characters their destiny was of necessity fatal. He took great pains to make this seem inevitable to the reader by anticipating it through his comment from the very beginning of his books. They live under its looming shadow. As a rule he renders the last, disastrous stage of their lives, -life on its way to death-. The outcome of all action, -little as it may be-, the end of all and the most impressive truth in life, is the inevitability of death. As life does not seem to point to anything beyond it, all action must of necessity appear futile in the light of this fact.

Death as sealing the outcome of failure was fascinating to Conrad. In several instances however, in spite of his pledge to sincerity, it is evident that he intentionally brought his heroes to a fatal end, although in the reality of life underlying his fiction the outcome was completely different or may well have been so. Almayer was a half-caste and may not have known anything of the morbid introspectiveness of the European mind. He may even have been comparatively happy in his sordid life. Both Almayer and Willems may still have been alive when already buried by Conrad. The writer points this out himself in an apologetic

passage to the address of Almayer (A Personal Record)

The most obvious deflection of facts for the sake of demonstrating inevitable failure and downfall can be found in Lord Jim. The story of the pilgrimage Patna is based on fact. In the reality of life Jim did not however jump (see Gordan). Conrad gives a psychological motivation for this fact in the first part of the book, where the boy Jim misses his chance to get into a life-boat during a gale and distinguish himself, simply because he was afraid. In reality, Jim's chance was literally thrown at his head. He was the only one who stayed on board when officers and crew abandoned ship and pilgrims in an emergency. He was then unduly praised and rewarded for something which he may have done from mere timidity and simplicity.

Conrad reversed this fact in his fiction to make it serve his ends and to bring it to terms with his truth - making us believe that Jim is 'simple-minded' throughout the book, when we know him to have a sensitive and subtle and imaginative mind. In the book, Jim, in a treacherous calm of the universe, is trapped into downfall by the hollow threats of some malevolent disaster. He leaves and abandons the ship when he should have stayed, thereby causing his ultimate undoing.

A similar arrangement of facts took place for the writing of the story 'The Brute' (A Set of Six). Conrad gives the reason for his procedure in the preface to the story :

The Brute I have unscrupulously adapted to the needs of my story, thinking that I had there something in the nature of poetical justice. I hope that little villainy will not cast a shadow upon

the general honesty of my proceedings as a writer of tales.

Capable of plainly turning literal truth into its opposite in the case of Jim, Conrad was however intransigent when reality was in accordance with his convictions. When he had reached the lowest point of his worldly fortunes, he was asked to turn the bitter end of 'Freya of the Seven Isles' to a happy one. His American readers had found it cruel, and he was to change it to their liking.

On this occasions he wrote to Garnett :

As to faking a 'sunny' ending to my story, I would see all the American Magazines and all the American Editors damned in heaps before lifting my pen to that task. I have never been particularly anxious to rub shoulders with the piffle they print with touching consistency from year's end to year's end.

The man's name was Sutton. He died in just that same way - but I don't think he died of Slav temperament.

That's how Freya came to be written. But of course facts are nothing unless they are made credible, and it is there that I have failed.

(To F.N. Doubleday, Aubry II, p.338, 7th Feb., 1924)

Another example which shows his selection to be determined by his particular convictions is the trilogy 'Youth'. Conrad stated in a letter to his publisher :

.. every volume of my short-stories has a unity of artistic purpose, a mode of feeling and impression ...

.. take the volume of Youth, which in its component parts presents the threeeages of man (for that is what it really is, and I knew very well what I was doing when I wrote 'The End of the Tether' to be the last of that trio)...

The titles 'Youth, 'Heart of Darkness and 'The End



of the 'Tether' as summing up the main stages of man's life speak for themselves. On reading 'Youth' the title of that story gains an ironic undertone by contrast with its contents. The ship on which Marlow-Conrad lived the life of youth in ignorance and hope (hope resulting from ignorance) is presented symbolically as life - a wreck from the beginning, and bound to sink. In some corner a lingering malignant disaster is lurking, that infernal something 'which taints every cause'. The meaning expressed through one image overcasts the whole story :

A portion of several boards holding together had fallen across the rail, and one end protruded overboard, like a gangway leading upon nothing, like a gangway leading over the deep sea, leading to death - as if inviting us to walk the plank at once and be done with our ridiculous troubles.

(p.29)

A magnificent death had come like a grace, like a gift, like a reward ...

(p.39)

The crew, and the captain with the boyish eyes, certainly do not give in to the temptation to abandon their struggle, but all the same the story is tinged with the melancholy feeling of old age looking with sad and regretful eyes upon the irremediably lost days of youth.

Youth, strength, genius, thoughts, achievements, simple hearts - all dies ... no matter.

(Youth, p.8)

Our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life that while it is expected is already gone - has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash, -together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusion

(Youth, p.48)

One can almost see the smile of pity and compassion on the lips of the narrator, at the ignorance and foolish-

ness of his young hope.

Do you see the lot of us there, putting a neat furl on the sails of that ship doomed to arrive nowhere?

(Youth, p.31)

.. the feeling that I could last forever, outlast the sea, the earth, and all men; the deceitful feeling that lures us on to joys, to perils, to love, to vain effort - to death; the triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust, the glow in the heart that with every year grows dim, grows cold, grows small, and expires - and expires, too soon, too soon, before life itself.

(Youth, p.41)

Conrad states that in 'Youth' 'a feeling poked its head through the narrative and certainly defaced it in many a place'. The youthful zest and steadfastness is there all the same, being the more admirable because of its futility. As ever in Conrad it almost keeps balance with the resigned wisdom of age, but ultimately the scales are tipped on the negative side, and there is a radical doubt cast over the value of all human endeavour. Certainly the crew reached the east - but for what?

In 'Heart of Darkness' earth has assumed the aspect of Purgatory and Hell. The feeling permeating it trembles on the verge of insanity. The revelation of the 'truth' is too sinister for words. Finally, in 'The End of the Tether' a good old man, who has led an honest and spotless life up to his old age, is led into unspeakable guilt and put to an ignoble death by his very goodness of heart. Conrad never forgets to let us hear the sardonic laughter of some fiend at the ludicrous assumption of a divine benevolence.

The setting of Conrad's stories, exotic countries and the sea in most books, had hitherto in fiction provided the stage for glorious adventure.

Conrad's basic selection inside this setting however is a phase of life which ends in failure and death.

## 2. Conrad's Universe.

The victims of Conrad's pen are all seen against a vast, menacing universe, hopelessly dwarfed by the tremendous and terrible forces acting on them.

Joseph de Smet has qualified Conrad's particular angle of vision :

Il ne l'a pas (reality) reflété comme un miroir, il n'a retenu que ce qui s'harmonisait avec sa pensée, avec son sentiment. (p.62)

Conrad sees and describes with extreme clarity, but from one particular angle only. His vision is normal and unusual at the same time. What fascinates his eye is evident, but let us take a striking example, where the 'Narcissus' is setting out on a vast expanse of sea full of light. The tug boat is just leaving her :

She resembled an enormous and aquatic black beetle, overwhelmed by the sunshine, trying to escape with ineffectual effort into the distant gloom of the land. She left a lingering smudge of smoke on the sky, and two vanishing trails of foam on the water. On the place where she had stopped a round black patch of soot remained, undulating on the swell - an unclean mark of the creature's rest.

The gloom of the land is sharply contrasted with the clear light of the sea, like the graceful white sailing ship with this black, unclean creature. This contrast symbolizes Conrad's view of his two main settings.

On the whole, it is the night-side of reality which fascinates him. Just as joy, mirth, happiness and laughter, the spark of redeeming humour, are entirely lacking in the life of his characters, so are graceful shapes and joyous colours in his universe.

The concentration of essentials as seen from his angle, elementary colour, shape and matter, is densest in 'Heart of Darkness'.

Marlow says 'it was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares ...

In a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf .. rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair ..

(pp.70-71)

It presents reality in a feverish vision, as seen through a distorting and darkening pane of glass.

I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the boulders, and also for an undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty nails.

(p.72)

Then follows the description of the meeting with the black workers chained together, 'swayed' and 'driven' by 'strong, lusty, red-eyed devils', and the group of dying in the little grove, - a more real and vivid evocation of hell than any other in fiction-. It is comparable in its quality with the image of the drifting silver-lighter and its human lead in the abysmally dark gulf of Sulaco, with the candle lit for a while to find the moaning Hirsch.

The great and 'inscrutable' forces which act through nature towards the doom of the human victim cast their looming shadows over Conrad's universe. There is a constant atmosphere of gloom and twilight, the colours of nightmare, Darkness prevails and envelops the crucial scene of the moral strife : the



temptation and fall of a human soul and its subsequent struggle against perdition, occasionally lit up by convulsive and infernal flickers of light. The sun is a fiery orb which scorches the earth -

A blinding sunlight drowned all this at times in a sudden recrudescence of glare.

(Heart of Darkness, p.72)

Another excellent example is the passage of the Patna through the Red Sea :

She held on straight for the Red Sea under a serene sky, under a sky scorching and unclouded, enveloped in a fulgor of sunshine that killed all thought, oppressed the heart, withered all impulses of strength and energy.

Every morning the sun, as if keeping pace in his revolutions with the progress of the pilgrimage, emerged with a silent burst of light ... caught with her up at noon, pouring the concentrated fire of his rays on the pious purposes of the men .. sank mysteriously into the sea evening after evening.

Such were the days, still, hot, heavy, disappearing -- as if falling into an abyss for ever open ...

..the ship, lonely under a wisp of smoke, held on her steadfast way black and smouldering in a luminous immensity as if scorched by a flame flicked at her from heaven without pity.

The nights descended on her like a benediction.

(Lord Jim, pp.11-12)

The light of the day is glaring and blinding in Conrad's world, showing sharp contours and casting black shadows, not allowing for soft outlines and pleasant colours. There is mostly intense heat, increasing the hothouse atmosphere. The description of sunsets, the dying out of light and the invasion of darkness if one of his favourite topics.

Take 'Heart of Darkness' :

And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to

a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men.  
(p.53)

This is the beginning of 'Heart of Darkness' - near London, where 'darkness was yesterday' (p.55), and in a certain sense it is a place of darkness again. Life 'is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in a flicker...' Darkness stands for the menacing horrors surrounding man's life and irresistibly swallowing it - the light. The gradual dimming of eyesight or blinding, physical or mental, accompanies the progress of despair in men's lives. Silently and viciously evil strikes from the dark, just as the Nigger seems to come from the night - a mere shadow and a voice.

From the beginning it is made clear, that the universe conspires with the tempters :

The universe conspired with James Wait. Suddenly the Nigger's eyes rolled wildly, became all whites. He put his hand to his side and coughed twice, a cough metallic, hollow, and tremendously loud : it resounded like two explosions in a vault : the dome of the sky rang to it ... (p.106)

Sometimes the dangers gradually impose themselves upon men in their loneliness :

They both, for the first time, became aware that they lived in conditions where the unusual may be dangerous, and that there was no power on earth outside themselves to stand between them and the unusual. (Outpost, p.98)

The reader is aware of the unusual all the time, before its victims can realise it :

A deep, rapid roll nearby would be followed by another far off - then all ceased. Soon short appeals would rattle out here and there, then all

single together, increase, become vigorous and sustained, would spread out over the forest, roll through the night, unbroken and ceaseless, near and far as if the whole land had been one immense drum booming out steadily an appeal to heaven .. sudden yells darted shrill and high in discordant jets of sound which seemed to rush far above the earth and drive all peace from under the stars.

In Lord Jim we have a perfect example of how a deceptive lull of the universe precedes the vicious onslaught.

A marvellous stillness pervaded the world, and the stars, together with the serenity of their rays, seemed to shed upon the earth the assurance of everlasting security. The young moon, recurved, and shining low in the west, was like a slender shaving thrown up from a bar of gold, and the Arabian Sea, smooth and cool to the eye, like a sheet of ice extended its perfect level to the perfect circle of a dark horizon. The propeller turned without a check, as though its beat had been part of the scheme of a safe universe...

Jim on the bridge was penetrated by the great certitude of unbounded safety and peace that could be read on the silent aspect of nature like the certitude of fostering love upon the placid tenderness of a mother's face.

.. the eternity beyond the sky seemed to come down nearer to the earth, with the augmented glitter of the stars, with the more profound sombreness in the lustre of the half-transparent dome covering the flat disk of an opaque. The ship moved so smoothly that her onward motion was imperceptible to the senses of men, as though she had been a crowded planet speeding through the dark spaces of ether behind the swarm of suns, in the appalling and calm solitudes awaiting the breath of future creations. (p.13)

The universal relations are brought here at the price of a severe slip of method.

The attack is sudden and catches the victim un-awares; he cannot read the awful omens predicting it. The skipper, the 'incarnation of everything vile and

base that lurks in the world we love', and Jim's tempter, has just come onto the bridge with his engineer.

.. he .. suddenly pitched down head-first as though he had been clubbed from behind. He said 'Damn!' as he tumbled; an instant of silence followed upon his screeching : Jim and the skipper staggered forward by common accord, and catching themselves up, stood very stiff and still gazing, amazed, at the undisturbed level of the sea. Then they looked upwards at the stars.

What had happened? The wheezy bump of the engines went on. Had the earth been checked in her course? They could not understand; and suddenly the calm sea, the sky without a cloud appeared formidably insecure in their immobility, as if poised on the brow of yawning destruction.

A faint noise as of thunder infinitely remote, less than a sound, hardly more than a vibration, passed slowly, and the ship quavered in response, as if the thunder had growled deeply in the water. The eyes of the two Malays at the wheel glittered towards the white men, but their hands remained closed on the spokes. (p.19)

This is but the first stroke of the wild beast's paw which gets ready to strike violently. Gradually the 'true horror behind the appalling face of things' then becomes evident, the 'directing spirit of perdition' which lives in things 'like a malevolent soul in a detestable body' (p.23). The prolonged and sudden attacks are elaborately drawn out in Lord Jim :

He saw a silent black squall which had eaten up already one third of the sky .. a darkening of the horizon, no more; then a cloud rises opaque like a wall. A straight edge of vapour lined with sickly whitish gleams flies up from the south-west, swallowing the stars in whole constellations; its shadow flies over the waters, and confounds sea and sky into one abyss of obscurity. And all still. No thunder, no wind, not a flicker of lightning. Then in the tenebrous immensity a livid arch appears; a swell or two like undulations of the very darkness run past,

and suddenly, wind and rain strike together with a peculiar impetuosity as if they had burst through something solid. (p.75)

The stars are the 'guiding lights' of the sailors, giving them their direction over the depths and vast spaces, and there is ever-repeated insistence on their disappearance.

'It was black, very black', pursued Jim ('it was so beastly, beastly dark', in H.O.D.) .. It had sneaked upon us from behind. The infernal thing! I suppose there had been at the back of my head some hope yet. I don't know. But that was all over anyhow. It maddened me to see myself caught like this. I was angry as though I had been trapped. I was trapped!

The turmoil of terror .. had scattered their self-control like chaff before the wind ..

In this assault upon his fortitude there was the jeering intention of a spiteful and vile vengeance...

It managed though, to knock over something in my mead .. Was there ever one so shamefully tried?

(pp.75-76)

In this way Jim is made to jump. He 'knew no more about it than the uprooted tree knows of the wind that laid it low'. 'I wished I could die', he cried. 'There was no going back. It was as if I had jumped into a well -into an everlasting deep hole .. (p.82) And he was tried by 'a joke hatched in hell'.

Life becomes hell after the great moral downfall. The universe shows its true face, comes to life in horrible shapes, contorted and repulsive, containing odious dangers, death, corruption, doom and decay. After the universe has trembled with the fall (he experienced suddenly a staggering sense of insecurity, an absurd and bizarre flash of a notion that the house had moved a little under his feet; Return, p.135), the corruption of man taints it and brings out its true aspect; touching the heart of the victim with withering



fear, and cutting him off from his kind :

He was afraid with the penetrating faltering fear that seems, in the very middle of a beat, to turn one's heart into a handful of dust. The contamination of her crime spread out, tainted the universe, tainted himself; woke up all the dormant infamies of the world; caused a ghastly kind of clairvoyance in which he could see the towns and fields of the earth, its sacred places, its temples and its houses, peopled by monsters - by monsters of duplicity, lust, and murder. (Return, p.135)

.. and for less than a second he looked upon the mysterious universe of moral suffering, as a landscape is seen complete, and vast, and vivid, under a flash of lightning, so he could see disclosed in a moment all the immensity of pain that can be contained in one short moment of human thought.

.. his rapid vision left in Alvan Hervey's mind a trail of invincible sadness, a sense of loss and bitter solitude, as though he had been robbed and exiled. (Return, p.133)

This is the point of revelation at which all Conrad's fiction aims. Even to the evil Donkin the world seems changed after he has scared the Nigger to death in the darkness :

He stood motionless and perfectly astounded to find the world outside as he had left it; there was the sea, the ship, -sleeping men; and he wondered absurdly at it, as though he had expected to find men dead, familiar things gone for ever as though, like a wanderer returning after many years, he had expected to see bewildering changes. (Nigger, p.114)

After they have walked into the pitfall, their 'very Maker seems to abandon the sinners to their own devices (Lord Jim, p.71). Their main punishment lies in their hopeless and agonising moral isolation. They are left alone with the monstrous fears through which the universe and their own soul torture them. These are rendered at great length in the Outcast :

.. he was unable to conceive that any act of his could interfere with the very nature of things, could dim the light of the sun, could destroy the perfume of the flowers, the submission of his wife, the smile of his children ... (p.3)

He felt as if he was the outcast of all mankind, and as he looked hopelessly round, before resuming his weary march, it seemed to him that the world was bigger, the night more vast and more black; but he went on doggedly with his head down ... (p.30)

He had a terrible vision of shadowless horizons where the blue sea and the blue sky met; or a circular and blazing temptiness where a dead tree and a dead man drifted together, suddenly, up and down, upon the brilliant undulations of the straits. (p.330)

He ceased and looked round slowly. How dark it was! (p.275)

From time to time he felt on his face the passing, warm touch of an immense breath coming from beyond the forest, like the short panting of an oppressed world. (p.282)

.. there was for a short period of formidable immobility above and below, during which the voice of the thunder was heard, speaking in a sustained, emphatic and vibrating roll, with violent louder bursts of crashing sound, like a wrathful and threatening discourse of an angry god.

.. he saw the water spring out from the dry earth to meet the water that fell from the sombre heaven.. (p.273)

Yes, death. Why should he die? No! Better solitude, better hopeless waiting, alone. Alone. No! he was not alone, he saw death looking at him from everywhere; from the bushes, from the clouds - he heard her speaking to him in the murmur of the river, filling the space, touching his heart, his brain with a cold hand.

He saw the horrible form among the big trees, in the network of creepers in the fantastic outline of leaves, of the great indented leaves that seemed to be so many enormous hands with big broad palms, with stiff fingers outspread to lay hold of him; hands gently stirring, or hands arrested in a frightful immobility, with a stillness attentive and waiting for the opportunity to take him, to enlace him, to strangle him, to hold him till he died ... (p.330)

And so Conrad goes on for pages, in his worst manner, talking his images over till nothing remains of them.

## The Land.

The spirit of the land, as becomes the ruler of great enterprises, is careless of innumerable lives.

(Lord Jim, p.164)

The land as a setting is always seen from the sailor on shore, with a great amount of distrust. It offers perplexing complications, which do not exist on the sea. Towns, countries in South America, the jungle in Africa or Malaya, all are a wilderness full of fantastic dangers, full of the same turmoil and strife, each creating their deadly creatures in their own way - all struggling relentlessly for survival and all doomed to perish.

The wilderness of the jungle is often shown as the image of life, -of its dark side-. Here is young Dain, a creature of the jungle, on the point of eloping with Almayer's daughter :

As he skirted in his weary march the edge of the forest he glanced now and then into its dark shade, so enticing in its deceptive appearance of coolness, so repellent with its unrelieved gloom, where lay, entombed and rotting, countless generations of trees (repeated image of man), and where their successors stood as if mourning, in dark green foliage, immense and helpless, awaiting their turn. Only the parasites seemed to live there in a sinuous rush upwards into the air and sunshine, feeding on the dead and on the dying alike and crowning their victims with pink and blue flowers that gleamed amongst the boughs, incongruous and cruel, like a strident and mocking note in the solemn harmony of the doomed trees.

An acrid smell of damp earth and of decaying leaves took him by the throat, and he drew back with a scared face, as if he had been touched by the breath of death itself. The very air seemed dead in there, -heavy and stagnating, poisoned with the corruption of countless ages.

(Almayer's Folly, p.167)

We are shown Almayer, standing in front of his decaying bungalow, expecting his salvation to come down

the river. It flows at his feet like a huge snake, out of a dark wilderness brooding over venomous dangers in intense heat, flowing into nothing - the vast emptiness of the distant sea.

.. an angry and muddy flood rolled under his inattentive eyes carrying small drift-wood and big dead logs, and whole uprooted trees with branches and foliage, amongst which the water swirled and roared angrily.

One of those drifting trees grounded on the shelving shore just by the house and Almayer, neglecting his dream, watched it with languid interest. The tree swung slowly round, amid the hiss and foam of the water, and soon getting free of the obstruction began to move downstream again, rolling over slowly, raising upwards a long, denuded branch, like a hand lifted in mute appeal to heaven against the river's brutal and unnecessary violence..

.. he envied the lot of that inanimate thing now growing small and indistinct in the deepening darkness.  
(p.4)

It is evident what Almayer's fate is going to be after such forebodings, but the victims of such dread do not see the signs, although their fate is written all over the face of the surrounding matter. Its semblance of eternity and of matter containing spiritual substance is plainly not the illusory effect of moral shock.

The jungle is an essentially hostile force, seen through hate and fear, luring men into the arms of its wilderness. It is full of teeming death and decay, its creatures struggling cruelly and mercilessly for survival, shooting up to the light from a dark and hot womb, being strangled and falling back into darkness and chaos, where they serve as soil for other hothouse-creatures. We know it to be full of a mysterious and dark life, but we do not see much of it. It is a curious

fact in Conrad, that there are no seasons - no soft and hopeful spring, and no winter - we are ever in dense heat or in the wet season and mostly under the glaring light of the sun. Also, there are very few animals in Conrad's world - only some in his late books - there are some dogs - tykes, mongrels and the like, snakes and mastiffs and toads - but there are never animals as objects of human affection. They are neither seen as friends and helpers of man, nor as his enemies - as potential dangers perhaps. Equally strange, there are next to no children in his work. The dangers in Conrad's world are vague and completely shapeless - merely of a spiritual order - dangers of the soul, and not of the body. The profound fear and anguish at the bottom of existence is not of bodily origin, not felt through the senses by touch or pain, or at least in very few cases. It is merely the dread and anguish of souls in the face of their pending perdition, a dread which we feel in such intensity and perfection only in our dreams.

Here is the image of the earth in Conrad's early talkative manner :

.. the earth unfolded in the star-light peace became a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battle-field of phantoms terrible and charming, august and ignoble, struggling ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts. An unquiet and mysterious country of inextinguishable desires and fears. (Lagoon, p.193)

Such images are abundant in Conrad's fiction. The earth is one big grave-yard, 'a malevolent shadow spinning in the sunlight', (Preface of Victory) buried in clouds. Heaven mostly has an aspect of sorrow and grief, its clouds looking like rags. It cries over the fate of the earth in tremendous squalls of rain,



and accompanies the downfall of men with deluge-like downpours. If cloudless it contains the fiery orb of the sun which scorches everything alive under it. Its dome resounds to the universal struggle - sheets of flame and fire accompanied by tremendous sounds of explosion are flashed into abysmal darkness to show its danger against some damnation. The very soul of the world seems oppressed and afflicted by some dark menace and grief, blowing in mighty blasts on the little exertions of men, who are hopelessly dwarfed and over-matched against such a tremendous background. Earth is an 'accursed inheritance', man doomed to wrestle his means of existence from its hostile power, in unending sordid toil.

In 'Heart of Darkness' we have the gloomiest view of the land and of the earth:

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there - there you could look at a thing monstrous and free.

(p.109)

The savages are creatures of the land, untamed by the restraints of many centuries of civilization, and therefore tools of evil. We also, as we are told, are creatures of the earth and have our share of the savage. Through something akin in his soul Kurtz was overcome by the fantastic black woman, the incarnation of the 'sorrowful land', of its 'tenebrous and passionate soul', with a 'tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb despair' (p.153). Even the stillness of the earth 'did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect' (p.105).

Man has taken 'possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil' (p.108)

And here is man wandering on the earth:

Paths, paths everywhere; a stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land, through long grass, through burnt grass, through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with heat; and a solitude, a solizude, nobody, not a hut ....

Now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side. A great silence around and above .... (p.80)

The 'hidden inner truth' (H.o.D., p.106) of the 'heart of the land' is 'lurking death .. hidden evil .. profound darkness' (p.104). There is in it 'an appeal and a menace' (p.92), audible in the weird sound of drums, whose throbbing appeals to the instincts but is hateful to reason. Kurtz looks at it 'with a mingled expression of wistfulness and hate' (p.165).

## The Sea.

We have by now realised, that Conrad's 'wayfarers' and 'pilgrims' are not waylaid by robbers in human shapes, but by mysterious forces of the universe in vague, but the more horrid forms, - by devils and monsters and demons -. They prowl at every turn of the path like beasts of prey, ready for the deadly assault. The gloom of the land and its stifling atmosphere is constantly opposed to the light of the sea and its invigorating winds. Here is Marlow returning with Jim from the jungle to the sea:

.. we sweltered side by side in the stagnant super-heated air; the smell of mud, of marsh, the primeval smell of fecund earth, seemed to sting our faces; till suddenly at a bend it was as if a great hand far away had lifted a heavy curtain, had flung open an immense portal. The light itself seemed to stir, the sky above our heads widened, a far-off murmur reached our ears, a freshness enveloped us, filled our lungs, quickened our thoughts, our blood, our regrets - and, straight ahead, the forests sank down against the dark-blue ridge of the sea.

.. the different atmosphere .. seemed to vibrate with a toil of life, with the energy of an impeccable world, this sky and this sea were open to me .. There was a sign, a call in them... 'This is glorious!' I cried ...

(Jim, p. 244)

Although the sea is seen as a much less odious element than the dark and gloomy land, with the light on its surface and its cool breezes, it has, as a moral force in the strife displayed, - or rather as a force of cruel and relentless moral retribution -, much the same function.

The men in sailing ships depended on the forces of nature to carry them across the oceans, in an unending struggle to make them serve their ends. They needed the water and its currents to carry them, its winds to move them, and the stars of the sky for their guidance. The land,

they only saw from afar, and it offered perplexing problems to their simple minds. The sea, as the setting most familiar to Conrad, offered itself foremost to show human lives in universal relationships, and made these stand out most impressively and clearly in their 'isolation from all land-entanglements'.

Conrad took all his affection to it, which, lacking human beings near and dear to him, filled his whole life. He was cruelly repelled by its cold and hostile unconcern and its dangers. He was never really at home on the sea, like sailors of true stamp, although being thoroughly familiar with its ships and men, with its currents, winds and calms. On the other hand however, he never ceased to consider the land with the mistrust of the man of the sea, and to oppose the 'bond of the sea' to the wilderness of society - the small pledged community of men who had to put all their trust for survival in the strength of their ship, the strength of their own hands, and their fidelity to duty, under the exacting toil of their profession-, for a reward which lay alone in their love of their work.

The Mirror of the Sea is the book in which Conrad has reflected at length on the various aspects of the sea, and his own relation to it: his love and his passion which had seduced him to leave his home-country for its sake. Conrad writes in the Mirror:

Looking back after much love and much trouble, the instinct of primitive man, who seeks to personify the forces of nature for his affection and for his fear, is awakened again in the breast of one civilized beyond that stage even in his infancy.

I surrendered my being to that passion ...

.. for twenty years I had lived like a hermit with my passion. Beyond the line of the sea horizon the world for me did not exist as assuredly as it does not exist for the mystics who take refuge on the tops of high mountains.

(Authors's Note, p. VIII, Mirror, p. 71)

In this book the oceans are made mighty kings, and the winds and currents have their individual lives. Ships have their personal characteristics and are more than instruments in man's hands. He writes:

The other (sailing vessel) seems to draw its strength from the very soul of the world, its formidable ally .. for what is the array of the strongest ropes, the tallest spars and the stoutest canvas against the mighty breath of the infinite, but thistle stalks, cobwebs and gossammer?

Indeed, it is less than nothing, and I have seen, when the great soul of the world turned over with a heavy sigh, a perfectly new, extra stout foresail vanish like a bit of some airy stuff lighter than gossamer. (p.37)

The machinery must do its work even if the soul of the world has gone mad.

But in a gale, the silent machinery of a sailing ship would catch not only the power, but the wild and exulting voice of the world's soul.

.. there was always that wild song, deep like a chant, for a bass to the shrill pipe of the wind played on the sea-tops.

At times the weird effects of that invisible orchestra would get upon a man's nerves till he wished himself dead. (p.38)

Ships, like men, are beset by the powers of the deep:

.. under the equator and under a low grey sky the ship, in close heat, floated upon a smooth sea that resembled a sheet of ground glass. Thunder squalls hung on the horizon, circled round the ship, far off and growling angrily, like a troop of wild beasts afraid to charge home.

(Nigger, p.77)

As we see, Conrad has carried all the poetry of the sea into his fiction. Here is the ship becalmed at night:

At night, through the impenetrable darkness of earth and heaven, broad sheets of flame waved noiselessly; and for half a second the becalmed craft stood out with its mast and rigging, with every sail and every rope distinct and black in the centre of a fiery outburst, like a charred ship enclosed in a globe of fire. And, again, for long hours she remained lost in a vast universe of night



and silence where gentle sighs wandering here and there like forlorn souls, made the still sails flutter as in sudden fear, and the ripple of beshrouded ocean whispered its compassion afar - in a voice mournful, immense and faint...

The crew of the ship Narcissus is an allegory for the different forces of the human soul, - the ship is a symbol of man wandering in absolute loneliness over the depths of life, depending on his own strength for his survival:

The passage had begun, and the ship, a fragment detached from the earth, went on lonely and swift like a small planet. Round her the abysses of sky and sea met in an unattainable frontier. A great circular solitude moved with her, ever changing and ever the same, always monotonous and always imposing. Now and then another white speck, burdened with life, appeared far off - disappeared; intent on its own destiny. The sun looked upon her all day.

(Nigger, p.25)

At the same time the ship stands for human society and for earth:

She had her own future: she was alive with the lives of those beings who trod her decks; like that earth which had given her up to the sea, she had an intolerable load of regrets and hopes. On her lived timid truths and audacious lies and like the earth she was unconscious, fair to see - and condemned by men to an ignoble fate. The august loneliness of her path lent dignity to the sordid inspiration of her pilgrimage. (p.26)

On deck the men exchanged bitter words, suggested by a silly exasperation against something unjust and irremediable, that would not be denied, and would whisper into their ears long after Donkin had ceased speaking. Our little world went on its curved and unswerving path carrying a discontented and aspiring population. (p.77)

Order, unflinching devotion to duty, courage and steadfastness are in the face of chaotic forces, in every individual as well as in the small community floating on the brink of an abyss, the only means of survival. As soon as they flag, the sea stirs like a beast of prey and prepares for a deadly assault, as the whole of the Nigger shows:

Meantime the helmsman, anxious to know what the row was about, had let go the wheel.

The 'Narcissus', left to herself, came up gently to the wind without any one being aware of it. She gave a slight roll, and the sleeping sails woke suddenly, coming all together with a mighty flap against the masts, then filled again one after another in a quick succession of loud report that run down the lofty spars...

It was as if an invisible hand had given the ship an angry shake to recall the men that peopled her decks to the sense of reality, vigilance, and duty,- 'Helm up!' cried the master, sharply. (p.92)

The whole of the Nigger is an excellent example of how the moral strife in the life of man is accompanied by violent commotions of the universe, showing it to be a struggle in which the whole of creation is involved - cruel, merciless, and eternal.

Here the image of the sea as it finally presents itself to him and as it is seen in his books:

In the Nigger he writes:

The sea and the earth are unfaithful to their children: a truth, a faith, a generation of men goes - and is forgotte and it does not matter. (p.23)

All the tempestuous passions of mankind's young days, have passed like images reflected from a mirror, leaving no record up the mysterious face of the sea.

.. the sea has never been friendly to man. At most it has been the accomplice of human restlessness, and playing the part of dangerous abettor of world-wide ambitions.

(Mirror, p. 135)

Already I looked with other eyes upon the sea. I know it capable of betraying the generous ardour of youth as implacably as, indifferent to evil and good, it would have betrayed the basest greed or the noblest heroism. My conception of its magnanimous greatness was gone - and I looked upon the true sea - the sea that plays with men till their hearts are broken, and wears stout ships to soul. Open to all and faithful to none, it exercises its fascination for the undoing of the best. (p.148)

He - man or people - who, putting his trust in the friendship of the sea, neglects the strength and cunning of his right hand, is a fool! As if it were too great, too mighty for common virtues, the ocean has no compassion, no faith, no law, no memory. Its fickleness is to be held true to men's purposes only by an undaunted resolution and by a sleepless, armed, jealous vigilance, in which, perhaps, there has always been more hate than love. Odi et amo may well be the confession of those who consciously or blindly have surrendered their existence to the fascination of the sea. Conrad also speaks of 'the cynical indifference of the sea' to the merits of human suffering and courage. (p.135)

He shows the sea to be a terrible and cruel enemy of man. The 'spirit of the sea' however, the undaunted courage and steadfastness of the disappearing generation of men in sailing vessels, make it appear essentially sane in comparison with the feverish dream-vision of the land. These men are the stable foothold in a world gone mad, and their strength sheds a redeeming light over the cruel element which is their touchstone. Their community is however gradually undermined by the young people who come from the land, bearing the germ of corruption in their heart which stamps their origin as a womb of decay, whereas the sea brings out the true metal. The fury of the sea is vanquished by the guileless and strong. Their moral integrity is the 'sine qua non' for their survival and victory, because the sea destroys the weak and evil.

There is something straight and honest about it, and as such it proves a purifying force. Take Donkin appearing on deck after his hideous bullying of the Nigger:

.. and the immortal sea stretched away, immense and hazy, like the image of life, with a glittering surface and lightless depths. Donkin gave it a defiant glance and slunk off noiselessly as if judged and cast out by the august silence of its might. (p.114)

Donkin stays on land after this trip - his outstretched hand is scorned by his fellow-sailors, and he departs with a curse.

The same image is used for the land, but it is solely corrupting and condemning, not purifying though castigating.

And stretching away in all directions, surrounding the insignificant cleared spot of the trading post, immense forests, hiding fateful complications of fantastic life, lay in the eloquent silence of mute greatness.

(Outpost, p.94)

The land and its creatures are tools for the destruction of the children of the sea. The very smell of corruption penetrates into the ships on the coast, the wilderness flings its arms into them. All the great traitors are 'hopelessly at variance with the spirit of the sea'.

On the whole, the universe in Conrad's work is, through its imagery, shown to be full of blind destructive forces. Its very soul is afflicted with some great evil, brooding sadly and oppressed over it. Moral strife in the life of man is but a small facet of a tremendous struggle of darkness and light going right through the created world, as the consequence of some profound and woeful deficiency. Nature is in a constant process of decay and disintegration, caused by inherent corruption, and man is part of nature, -a breath of the spirit in a 'handful of dust'-. Earth is a grave in the clouds, clothed in fog or darkness, and wept over by heaven. The universe is doomed to perish in chaos cold and darkness, and it is seen exclusively from this angle. The moral shock of the revelation of evil in man tears away the veil hiding this fact. The universe is fallen, an 'accursed inheritance', and man is fallen a priori, irremediably, and his basic state is one of dread and anguish, because his intelligence enables him to realise this state of affairs. He is doomed to toil in fear and sorrow for his mere survival.

Yet it is so true that the germ of destruction lies in wait for us mortals, even at the very source of our strength. (Chance, p.310)

The small world of man, whether individual, community or mankind, and its civilisation, is like a flickering spark of light on a frail raft floating adrift on a tremendous gulf in absolute darkness, swayed by the breath of the invisible, and surrounded by the chaotic forces of the universe. Invisible, these forces keep unceasing watch and, at the least sign of weakness or lack of vigilance and order, strike viciously on the



weak spot, led by cunning instinct. Bit by bit, they break it and wear it down. We are on the raft and see the world reel from these blows. Order, undaunted courage in the devotion to duty are, in the face of this terrible fact, the only means of keeping the frail raft afloat and of avoiding the threatening abysses. But these qualities are gradually disappearing -, the light is gradually ebbing out of the world, darkness steadily invading it. The following image is typical of Conrad :

And on her track the flowing tide of a tenebrous sea filled the house, seemed to swirl around his feet, and rising unchecked, closed silently above his head.. he stepped out, with a rebellious heart, into the darkness of the house. It was the abode of an impenetrable night; as though indeed the last day had come and gone, leaving him alone in a darkness that has no tomorrow. (Return, p.182)

This image of darkness swallowing the light recurs in ever repeated variations. In this particular instance it takes place in a house full of light shown as the altar of domestic peace and safety, the very core of European civilisation.

In the process of the deterioration of characters there is a constant emphasis on the disappearance of 'land-marks', or 'guiding stars', on the 'dimming' of eyesight. The most perfect rendering of the victory of darkness in a story which is essentially seen, is the dimming of Captain Whalley's eyesight, his final blindness and destruction, as opposed to the quiet watchfulness and the clear perception of inevitable facts by the Malay savages.

In the light of these facts, the selfishness of man, be it 't he devil of violence, the devil of greed, or the devil of hot desire', (H.o.D., p.74) who betrays

his duty, is a|sin beyond redemption. The worst sinners seem to be those, who, pretending to be torch-bearers for the sake of a dream, open the dams for the invasion of darkness and despair.

This then is what Conrad wants to make us 'see'. Land-lubbers are invariably blind to these facts,-they are carefully kept away from them. It is essential to be able to see like this, -it is the absolutely necessary preliminary for existence and survival:

To see! to see! -this is the craving of the sailor, as of the rest of blind humanity. To have his path made clear for him is the aspiration of every human being in our beclouded and tempestuous existence.

(The Mirror of the Sea, p.87)

The mortal danger is always there, -ready to assail us when least expected-. The world is essentially spiritual, but there is no spiritual help for its evil, -man has to bear it without that consolation, and without hope of redemption. The dam against the invasion of the darkness and of Satan is not grace or redemption from outside, -man has to build it within himself. He must accept the bitter truth, discard all merciful illusions, and brace himself to face it: keeping forever vigilant, and never neglecting the strength of his right hand. All the same he is bound to be overcome, and yet he must fight, driven by the 'cruel strength of life'.

### 3. Society

In some of the 'Tales of Unrest' Conrad was set on dealing with society, and was too talkative about it to the detriment of his art.

In 'The Return' and 'Outpost' we have the image of two 'perfect' middle-class-citizens. Alan Hervey is shown as the 'High Priest' of the hearthstone of society, of its 'altar'.

They moved in their enlarged world amongst perfectly delightful men and women who feared emotion, enthusiasm, or failure, more than fire, war, or mortal disease; who tolerated only the commonest formulas of commonest thoughts, and recognised only profitable facts. It was an extremely charming sphere, the abode of all the virtues, where nothing is realised and where all joys and sorrows are cautiously toned down into pleasures and annoyances. In that serene region, then, where noble sentiments are cultivated in sufficient profusion to conceal the pitiless materialism of thoughts and aspirations.

(Return, pp. 120-121)

It is a completely rationalized world, 'disdainfully ignoring the hidden stream, the stream restless and dark; the stream of life'. The demons that would question the sense of their manner of life are ignored:

'What is right?' she said, distinctly.

'Your mind is diseased!' he cried, upright and austere.  
'Such a question is rot'. (p.156)

'Nothing that outrages the received beliefs can be right. Your conscience tells you that. ...they are the best, the noblest, the only possible. They survive.  
(p.157)

'You must respect the moral foundations of a society that has me you are. Be true to it That's duty - that's honour - that 's honesty. (p.158)

..the evil must be forgotten - must be resolutely ignored to make life possible; ... the knowledge must be kept out of mind, out of sight, like the knowledge of death certain is kept out of the daily existence of men. (p.156)

Hervey's conscience consists of the tenets of his class. His 'true conscience' is born however, when he is made to see the vast universe of pain from which the members of his class benefit. He comes to realise through a tremendous shock, that in view of reality the ends and tenets of society are utterly false, - foreign to the true nature of human beings. -

In Almayer the savages pursue the same aims and ends as civilised man. Their main aim is profit with a view to self-preservation. They however are not hampered by the trammels of civilisation and do not conceal their motives. There is something straight and honest about them:

She felt herself irresistibly fascinated, and saw with vague surprise the narrow mantle of civilised morality, in which good-meaning people had wrapped her young soul, fall away and leave her shivering and helpless as if on the edge of some deep and unknown abyss.

Nina saw only the same manifestations of love and hate and of sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shapes.

..the savage and uncompromising sincerity of purpose shown by her Malay kinsmen seemed at last preferable to the sleek hypocrisy, to the polite disguises, to the virtuous pretence of such white people as she had had the misfortune to come into contact with.

(Almayer's Folly, pp. 42-43, Nina)

In Conrad's view the organization of modern society is exclusively determined by economic ends, - greed for profit -. He casts never-ending derision on the assumption that moral improvement would go hand in hand with material progress. In his view the latter is the cause of all evil in modern life. It is the motive force for the great push of the civilised European countries into the heart of the

-benighted continents'. Material progress is primeval instinct enveloped in a crust of civilization, - cloaked in virtuous words -. Society is not what it claims and appears to be, - and the same is true of its individual representatives. Under the surface layer of Christian and humanistic pretences there is 'unmitigated savagery' of the same kind as that of the jungle. The best demonstration of this fact is 'Heart of Darkness' and 'Outpost of Progress'.

In the 'Outpost', Cartier and Kayerts, a former officer and a clerk, allow their servants to be sold as slaves. Although pretending to be shocked, they accept the ivory which is left behind as a reward for their consent:

And now, dull as they were to the subtle influences of surroundings, they felt themselves very much alone, when suddenly left unassisted to face the wilderness..

They were two perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals, whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organization of civilized crowds. Few men realize that their life, the very essence of their character, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings. The courage... the confidence ... and principles; every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd; to the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions, and of its moral in the power of its police and of its opinion.

But the contact with pure, unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart. To the sentiment of being alone of one's kind, to the clear perception of the loneliness of one's thoughts, ... to the negation of the habitual, which is safe, there is added, the affirmation of the unusual, which is dangerous...

(Outpost, p.89)

Society, not from any tenderness but because of its strange needs, had taken care of those two men, forbidding the all independent thought, all initiative, all departure from routine .. They could only live on condition of being machines. And now, released from the fostering care of men with pens behind the ears, they were like two life-long prisoners who, liberated after many years, do not know what use to make of their faculties, through want of practice, ... (p.91)



They lived like blind men in a large room, aware only of what came in contact with them... but unable to see the general aspect of things. The river, the forest, all the great land throbbing with life, were like a great emptiness... (p. 92)

After their servants are captured and they have become guilty, things are different:

Kayerts and Cartier did not disappear, but remained above on this earth, that had become bigger and very empty. It was not the absolute and dumb solitude of the post that had impressed them so much as an inarticulate feeling that something from within them was gone, something that worked for their safety, and had kept the wilderness from interfering with their hearts. The images of home; the memory of people like them, of men that thought and felt as they used to think and feel, receded into distances made indistinct by the glare of unclouded sunshine. And out of the great silence of the surrounding wilderness, its very hopelessness and savagery seemed to approach them nearer, to draw them gently, to look upon them, to envelop them with a solicitude irresistible, familiar, and disgusting.  
(p.107)

These two people are planted on the spot of their trial by a 'manager' of their organisation. The place is an 'Outpost of progress', ironically called a 'mission'. Their business is trade, and the manager and themselves agents in a great economic drive of which they form the spearhead. The voice of progress happens to be the horn of a steamer. Their economic task involves issues which are of much greater moment than trade. The one one is shot by the other who, in his turn, hangs himself on the cross on the grave of his predecessor, accompanied by the 'tumultuous peals of the mission bell', 'groping his way through the fog'. He is hanging on that cross when the 'voice of progress' calls him. It was:

A shriek inhuman, vibrating and sudden .. like the yells of some exasperated and ruthless creature...

Progress was calling to Kayerts from the river. Progress and civilisation and all the virtues. Society was calling to its accomplished child to come, to be taken care of, to be instructed, to be judged, to be condemned; it called him to return to that rubbish heap from which he had wandered away, so that justice would be done.

(An Outpost of Progress, p. 116)

The accomplished child of progress 'puts out a blue and swollen tongue at his managing director'.

The voice of economic progress is just as inhuman a shriek as the yells of the savages, and proves even more terrible in 'Heart of Darkness', - it terrifies savages into wild flight. As seen from its virtuous surface, society is hollow at the core, and so are its creatures, who have imbibed its seeming virtues and blessings, and then are made to realise its true ends. Savagery, which should have been mastered by the restraints fostered by centuries of Christian and humanistic civilization, breaks into their hearts and destroys them. In other words, the ends of society seem foreign to the nature of its creatures. Taking care of them through its organization and making them walk along prescribed paths, thereby limiting their freedom of action and expression, it seems to rob them of the chance of realising their true destiny, pitching them instead into unspeakable guilt. Their true destiny must be akin to the cause of their feeling of guilt after their betrayal.

There is an indissoluble antagonism between the real ends of society and its confessed beliefs - between its core and its appearance, and the individual is the victim of this conflict. His mode of thought and feeling being conditioned by society, he is used as an economic means. This use being foreign to his nature, or, we had better say, giving but scope to the inferior part of his nature,

he is led to destruction. He cannot be true to his real nature and attain his destiny in freedom, but is degraded to a tool for the strange needs of society. As long as he lives safely inside it, his ratio, being conditioned by it, responds to its rational organisation, when forced however to face the wilderness, he cannot grasp its ratio and finds it 'mysterious and incomprehensible'. Falling prey to the germs bred in him by society, or responding to that which is akin to it in the wilderness, he is cast out, having violated the common convention of secrecy over this aspect.

He now understands neither his own nature nor that of society.

In the large context of the European development of the last century P.F. Drucker, in his book 'The End of Economic Man', comments on this aspect:

Every organized society is built upon a concept of the nature of man and of his function and place in society. Whatever its truth as a picture of human nature, this concept always gives a true picture of the society which recognizes and identifies itself with it. (p.47)

Conrad evidently takes his heroes as typical examples of society and judges according to the manifestations of its values in them. Somewhere else Drucker continues:

Through the collapse of economic man the individual is deprived of his social order, and his world of its rational existence. He can no longer explain his existence as rationally coordinated and correlated to the world in which he lives, nor can he co-ordinate the world and the social reality to his existence. The function of the individual in society has become entirely irrational and senseless. Man is isolated within a tremendous machine, the purpose and meaning of which he does not accept and cannot translate into terms of his experience. Society ceases to be a community of individuals bound together by a common purpose, and becomes a chaotic hubbub of purposeless isolated monads. (p.54)

In this context he speaks of the 'return of the demons' into a seemingly completely rational world.

Jim is a figure of light seen against a vast and dark background - an irrational world. He goes out with the 'rotten spot' in his heart, planted by society, and runs away from it after its ends have become the cause of his failure. He goes out with a great dream of his destiny, but also under a 'cloud'. - He is branded by society after his failure, but called 'Tuan', Lord Jim after he has realised his dream. He is typical of the discrepancy of substance and appearance:

I liked his appearance; he came from the right place; he was one of us. He stood there for all the parentage of his kind, for men and women whose very existence is based upon honest faith ...

..he was outwardly so typical of that good, stupid kind we like to feel marching right and left of us in life...

I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes - and, by Jove! It wouldn't have been safe. He looked as genuine as a new sovereign, but there was some infernal alloy in his metal. The least drop of something rare and accursed; (p.32)

All of Conrad's heroes have gone out under a 'cloud', with the sordid inspiration of trade and profit and a great dream of their destiny. The two are incompatible. The dream, the glamour, the spirit is flouted and admired, but the grim reality only accepted with something short of despair. It would seem that society refutes the spiritual in man - something greater and better than trade and profit, - which entail cruelty and violence. There is a noble image of man in Conrad's heart, but there is no room for it in our world. There is nevertheless a feeling of expectancy, of never-dying hope for the advent of some redeeming cause, of some powerful charisma that would re-instate man into his proper place or at least give him certainty as to his true nature, and enable him to reach his true destiny. Even



though we never learn what man should be, we know that he should not be what he is made by the modern world, that this runs counter to his conception of himself and of the world - but what they really are remains open. There is a constant repetition of the clash of an ideal conception of man and of the world with reality, and the moral shock it entails is the focus of Conrad's creative vision.

This clash and contradiction is constantly embodied in characters, who all suffer from the affliction of modern society, -material ends-, which destroy the spiritual. This purpose of society as being foreign to life is shown in the august image of the sailing ship skimming gracefully over the dark depths of the oceans like a white bird in flight, carried by the breath of the infinite, in harmony with it, and scorning the demons which are set free by the land - entanglements. On the other hand, there is the 'sordid inspiration' of its flight, -its 'ignoble fate', commerce. There is the image of the same ship lying moored to a dark bay, its spars standing out like the bones of a skeleton, and its white wings flabbing like those of a worn-out bird. Conrad takes pains to show us that the heroes in his work are typical representatives of western Civilization. 'All Europe contributed to the making of Mr. Kurtz', (p.133) the 'first class agent' and 'remarkable man'. They are sent out as pioneers of this civilization, and are ironically treated as 'emissaries of light' (p.67) and 'pilgrims'. Kurtz, Conrad's symbol of truth, thinks that (p. 103) 'each station should be a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course but also for humanising, improving, instructing'. Later he joins the 'merry dance of death and trade' (p.70). 'That ass', his manager calls him, and after a while Kurtz is able to state that (p.167) 'you show them you have in you something that is really profitable, and then there will be no limits to the recognition of your abilities'. The 'International Society



for the Suppression of Savage Customs had intrusted him (Kurtz) with the making of a report...' (p.133). Their real task is enveloped in a haze of great words. They find a wild scramble for loot and join it. The crusading spirit of civilization has turned into something abominable. Here is its image: 'a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, beads, and brasswire set into the depths of darkness' (p.77). Kurtz becomes a 'great devil in the land' of darkness, and is 'adored' (p.144) and honoured by 'midnight dances with unspeakable rites'. 'It was his impatience with comparative poverty that drove him out there' (p.179), and a woman was connected with it too. There are 'images of wealth and fame revolving obsequiously round ... his lofty expression'. He is 'avid of lying fame, sham distinction, of all the appearances of success and power'. (p.166) Like all his fellow-characters, Kurtz is of non-descript profession: he is a musician, a journalist, a painter, a writer-, not specialised for one of the trodden paths of society -. Above all he is an orator,- he is 'an extremist and might belong to any party'- showing faith in what he is momentarily preaching. Now he is all out for ivory, and in the end he is an 'animated image of death carved out of old ivory' (p.151). 'The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball - an ivory ball...' Kurtz had sold his soul for ivory, and ends in 'hopeless despair'. 'Weird incantations ..had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations.. he had kicked himself loose of the earth'.. he had kicked the very earth to pieces'. (p.163) His greed for matter has almost killed the spirit in him.

The contact with the wilderness can only destroy these men because it can penetrate into the gulf between their surface and their core, - they are ready to succumb. Aissa, the creature of the wilderness:

'had awakened in his (Willems) breast the infamous thing which had driven him to what he had done...

...she took me as if I did not belong to myself. She did. I did not know there was something in my she could get hold of. She, a savage. I, a civilized European, and clever. She that knew no more than a wild animal! Well, she found out something in me. She found it out and I was lost. I knew it. She tormented me. I was ready to do anything. I resisted - but I was ready. I knew that too.

It isn't what I've done that torments me. It is the why. It's the madness that drove me to it. It's that thing that came over me.

(Outcast, p. 334)

Their hollowness does not show itself until they are left to themselves in utter solitude, in remote places, facing a state of life such as it was before man was touched by civilization: Kurtz's manager, envious of his talents, leaves him alone on purpose, to let the wilderness do its work. Marlow reflects on this:

How can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude - utter solitude without a policeman - by the way of silence - utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength...

(H.o.D., p. 132)

By their response to the call of the wilderness the thin crust of civilization is smashed, and they fall prey to the darkest side of their nature. Life in the apparent safety within society, and its ends, have made them defenceless, blind to the primitive and savage part in their selves. 'It was the writing on his forehead' says Babalatchi of Willems, 'he was born blind and it was his fate to walk blindly into death'.

People brown and black are shown to be at a prehistoric stage of morality, - by European measures. They are ruled by unmitigated savagery and fear, and the white man with his superior intelligence can shape them to good or evil. We learn from Kurtz that (p.144) the black people 'adored him... he came to them with thunder and lightning ..and they had never seen anything like it - and very terrible'. From this Mr. Kurtz draws his initial opinion:

..we whites, from the point of view of development we have arrived at, must necessarily appear to them (savages) in the nature of supernatural beings - we approach with the might as of a deity - By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded...(p.134)

Kurtz exerted all his power to drain the country of all the ivory that he could get hold of. Those black people who kept it from him were criminals, and ended as adornments for his bungalow. He sacked the country round his station with the help of tribes, ruling tyrannically and savagely over them. His success in trade is enormous, but the matter he strives after permeates his very body, destroying his soul. He is a symbol of society: his enormous selfishness, stressed over and over, - his powerful voice, image of brazen pretences -, and the core to which it is attached, - a death-like body:

His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide - it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. (p.151)

Kurtz probably is one aspect of the vague and great dream that drives men out, but he goes also under the 'cloud' - a man who, from enormous selfishness, like the man Brown in Jim, 'kicks the earth loose' for 'sham distinction'. The other aspect is the young man opposed to Kurtz - the young Russian, with his 'clear flame', who is completely selfless and wants nothing but mere adventure without material reward. He wants 'truth' like the boy Conrad when he dreamt over this spot on the map. He is seen apparently as a reflection of Conrad's self, but there is no place for him in society:

There he was before me, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain - why he did not instantly disappear...

The glamour of youth enveloped his particoloured rags, his destitution, his loneliness, the essential desolation of his futile wanderings. For months, -for years- his life hadn't been worth a day's purchase; and there he was gallantly, thoughtlessly alive, to all appearance indestructible solely by the virtue of his few years and of his unreflecting audacity .. Glamour urged him on, glamour kept him unscathed. He surely wanted nothing from the wilderness but space to breathe in and to push on through. His need was to exist, and to move onwards at the greatest possible risk, and with a maximum of privation. If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical gift of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this be-patched youth. I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame. It seemed to have consumed all thought of self completely.

(p.142)

He had lived unscathed beside Kurtz perdition, watching over him and being threatened by him alone because of the few means of existence he raised in the territory of Kurtz's terrible rule.



The far-spread slavery of black people in the service of progress, and the image of hell, the grove with the dying and outworn in H.O. D., shows the full extent of the betrayal of the white man's pretended mission.

The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous, and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly.... He had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck .. It looked startling round his neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas. (p.75)

A few yards away there is an immaculate white man, with a 'starched collar ... white cuffs' and a 'penholder behind his ear'.

Jim is also seen in contrast to mankind dark and yellow, and the ultimate judgment on his fate pronounced in this context. He is brought up in the old tradition and betrays it, tempted by easy money in an easy life. His betrayal gets a particularly infernal flavour by the fact that the 800 pilgrims which he abandons on the sea are distinctly shown as mankind black and brown, which sets an absolute trust in the strength of the white man's virtues: his absolute honesty, his greater courage and intelligence, and his immunity against the demons. As Conrad takes pains to show the white men in contrast of immaculate white against brown and black people, so he stresses the blind and absolute trust and faith of these people in him. The strongest image is that of the brown helmsmen, who stick to the helm of ships, unthinkingly and unsuspecting, when the white men are ruining or abandoning them. They provide the most damning witness of his guilt. There is the example of what the white man can make of their benighted lives in the contrast of TambItam, Jim's body-guard, who has found a task and a mission in life through Jim, and Brown's servant,



the Salomon'Islander, who is a perfect tool of the powers of the dark. From Kurtz onwards the 'men in the forefront of their kind' become more and more noble and are provided with attributes of nobility - the best example being Gould,- 'El Rey de Sulaco'-, in whose work the corrupting and destructive predominance of material interests is most obvious:

As long as the treasure flowed north, without a break, that utter sentimentalist, Holroyd, would not drop his idea of introducing, not only justice, industry, peace, to the benighted continents, but also that pet dream of his of a purer form of Christianity. (p.240)

This amounts to an accusation of society of being barren of the spirit. London in 'H.o.D.' is 'a mighty devourer of the world's light', Brussels 'a city of the dead' (p.65), civilisation in the east is 'a mighty and devouring stream' (p.166). We are told in 'H.o.D.', that the white people have lived in darkness too - and now it is surging back into their homes through 'progress', and its children bear its germ out,- and become worse than the primitives in their orgies of savagery, because of their pretences of virtue, and of the conspiracy and convention of secrecy over this fact. The values of society are seen as being crystallised in the hearts of those who go out to cope with the darkness, and Conrad judges them on the strength of their manifestations in this typical constellation. A stern and sarcastic judgment on its value and essence lies in the savage's view of the white man:

Gobila's manner was paternal, and he seemed really to love all white men. They all appeared to him very young, indistinguishably alike (except for stature), and he knew that they were all brothers, and also immortal. The death of the artist, who was the first white man whom he knew intimately, did not disturb his belief, because he was firmly convinced that the white stranger had pretended to die and got himself buried for some

mysterious purpose of his own, into which it was useless to inquire.

(Outpost, p. 95-96)

We know Kurtz's end, and his last opinion is, like a 'flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes'. As a result of his greed the white man has 'no restraint, no faith, no fear..' (p.163) and cannot repress all the evil that is evoked in him. Mr. Kurtz, left by his manager to the assault of the wilderness, 'had taken a high seat amongst the devils in the land'. (p.132)

Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts.. there was something wanting in him - some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last - only at the very last, but the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude - and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core.. (p.147)

In view of the shrunken heads on the poles of Kurtz's bungalow Marlow explains: 'I am not disclosing any trade-secrets. In fact the manager said afterwards that Mr. Kurtz's methods had ruined the district, I have no opinion on that point, but I want you clearly to understand that there was nothing exactly profitable in those heads being there...'

Later Marlow assures a Trading-Company representative:

I assured him that Mr. Kurtz's knowledge, however extensive, did not bear upon the problems of commerce and administration. (p.172)

(Marlow had to sign a declaration to keep 'trade secrets' for himself.)

Evidently there is more than material ends at stake. The shrunken heads on Kurtz's stakes are relics of the 'unspeakable rites' with which the savages had honoured their 'devil' Kurtz. This seems to imply, that the neglect of the spiritual over the 'material interests' of society and its creatures leads to a reassertion of the spiritual in horrible perversions. In spite of these horrors, Kurtz is seen as superior to the manager, 'a common trader' (p.83), with his devilish little smile, who is spiritually dead, and has no other mode of thought than profit. He is not upset about the perversion of Kurtz's crime, but only states that (p.155) 'the time was not ripe for vigorous action, the trade will suffer ..the method is unsound'.

At his end Kurtz 'pronounced judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth' (p.169) He ends up in 'condemning and loathing all the universe'. (p.176) 'He had made the last stride, he had stepped over the edge..' (p.170) There are repeated images of the horrors and demons provoked by raising of materialistic and economic ends to the position of sole gods on the altar of progress. We have the image of Kurtz himself, the idol and devil of ivory, looking like a skeleton, and here is Marlow opposing Kurtz in the crucial night-scene; where 'the truth' was revealed to Conrad:

Kurtz 'the wandering and tormented thing,... rose before him, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth, - misty and silent'. He is trying to escape to the weird incantations in the forest nearby.

'We were within thirty yards from the nearest fire. A black figure stood, up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow. It had horns, - antelope horns, I think - on its head. Some sorcerer, some witch-man, no doubt: it looked fiend-like enough. (p.161)

Kurtz is fetched back by the 'fierce river-demon', Marlow's old steamer, and his black followers on shore, led by three red demons with horns, (devil of greed, violence, hot desire) shout a 'satanic litany', to enchant the river demon, to yield their devil; but then they flee from its terrible voice. Kurtz, the 'emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else' (p.90), of the new 'gang of virtue', dies with the word 'horror' on his lips, is buried in a mud-hole, by 'faithless pilgrims' with 'absurd long staves in their hands' (p.86), and thus finishes his attempt to break the old order:

Transgression - punishment - bang! Pitiless, pitiless! That's the only way. (p.91)

These characters are brought to realise their 'true' nature. All that centuries of civilisation have taught them to be vile and abominable they find in themselves. Just as Hervey saw his paradise fall in ashes, so their dream, the knowledge of their true greatness and of their sublime destiny is consumed in the fire of a great moral shock. They perceive the 'horror' within themselves - the unleashed demons of their primitive instincts which openly raise their heads in the wilderness. But they also lurk everywhere in society. The demons of society tempt them, conspiring with the horrors of the wilderness and the sea.

'Tous ces êtres sont conduit à leur fin tragique avec l'impitoyable logique d'une fatilité que l'on sent inévitable dès le moment où l'acte définitif de leur carrière s'est accompli. Toujours les forces de la nature et de la société semblent conjurées pour leur perte, - dont la cause cependant n'existe qu'en eux-mêmes', is Joseph de Smet's judgment.

(Mercure, p. 74)

Society creates demons by its ends. They are the engineers of steamships on the sea, and the managers and directors of trading companies on shore - with all their many serving devils.



Rationalised society based on the end of material progress seems to carry the germ of destruction within itself and to impart it to its creatures. It creates selfishness and self-indulgence, wakening the hold of the spiritual on the night side of human nature, paralysing the will in the eternal struggle of the intellect against the chaotic assertion of savage instincts.

The struggle of will against passion is repeatedly rendered in Conrad - the gradual losing of hold:

He was keeping a tight hand on himself. A very tight hand. He had a vivid illusion - as vivid as reality almost - of being in charge of a slippery prisoner.

Now and then he would grasp the edge of the table and set his teeth hard in a sudden wave of acute despair, like one who, falling down a smooth and rapid declivity that ends in a precipice, digs his finger nails into the yielding surface and feels himself slipping helplessly to inevitable destruction.

Then, abruptly, came a relaxation of his muscles, the giving way of his will. Something seemed to snap in his head, and that wish, that idea kept back during all those hours darted into his brain with the heat and noise of a conflagration....

...he stood perfectly still, with a look of strained attention on his face as if listening to a far-off voice - the voice of his fate. It was a sound inarticulate but full of meaning; and following it there came a tearing and rending within his breast. He twisted his fingers together, and the joints of his hands and arms cracked. On his forehead the perspiration stood out in small pearly drops. He was looking round for help. This silence, this immobility of his surroundings seemed to him a cold rebuke, a stern refusal, a cruel unconcern. There was no safety outside of himself - and in himself there was no refuge...

He had a sudden moment of lucidity - he, a white man whose worst fault till then had been a little want of judgment and too much confidence in the rectitude of his kind. That woman was a complete savage...

He seemed to be surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilisation. He had a notion of being lost among shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly.



He struggled .. lost his footing .. With a faint cry and an upward throw of his arms he gave up as a tired swimmer gives up: because the swamped craft is gone from under his feet; because the night is dark and the shore is far - because death is better than strife.

(Outcast, p.78)

Willems 'plans in an access of despair ..the throwing away..of ungrateful civilisation'. He has become a mystery to himself. His impulses, his reason, his place on earth and in heaven, all are equally enigmatic and unreal. Society and universe seem utterly senseless:

Speech, action, anger forgiveness, all appeared to him alike useless and vain, appeared to him unsatisfactory, not worth the effort of hand or brain that was needed to give them effect. He could not see why he should not remain standing there, without ever doing anything, to the end of time. He felt something, something like a heavy chain, that held him there.

(p.272)

He stared on the river, past the schooner anchored in mid-stream, past the forests of the left bank; he stared through and past the illusion of the material world. (p. 291)

The hollowness at the core of the creatures of civilisation and the disintegration of their values under the stress of the wilderness is visually shown through the gradual dissolution of their physical substance. A solemn, bombastic and powerful voice remains attached to them - to Kurtz, or the Nigger. Hervey sees himself as many sham men in mirrors all round, holding forth about his values in unctuous tones, conscious of the discrepancy of word and fact. Men are other than they seem,- actors hiding a dark core -, and so too is society.

In Nostromo, 'material interests' are the key-word. The silver mine, sprung up in a glen which was full of snakes, becomes an ogre which draws the power of the state into its arms and affiliates the church. It rules the whole country, forcing its population into its service,

- each human being with his own set of false ideals-, and gives them rank and place in society, destroying lives, loves and loyalties. Gould himself is nothing other than a manager or a director on a large scale, another 'heretic pilgrim'. He is different from other heroes since he knows what he wants from his dream, -like Nostromo-, and seems void of evil. The material welfare and progress which the mine brings does not bring moral improvement, but provokes savagery and corrupts the best.

A tremendous vista opens in front of our eyes, and we see more than a hundred years of western development unrolling before our eyes: the breaking-up of feudal society through revolutions, the rule of savage dictators, followed by a time of anarchy, and then, without transition, the building-up of a capitalist society on liberal ideals, with threads running to the centres of western capitalism. The transition is sudden because the province of Sulaco had found an 'inviolable sanctuary' from the 'temptations of a trading world in the solemn hush of the deep Golfo Placido as if within an enormous..temple..! In the heart of this temple an idol is set up,- the silver-mine -, and it creates temptations and destroys the peace. There is finally in Nostromo the advent of socialism, provoked by the economic inequality and the rigid class-system of capitalism, although the latter has admittedly increased and promoted justice peace and general welfare.

Conrad formed the daughter of Senor Avellanos after the model of 'his first love', and maybe her father, a noble patrician like his sea captains, after the image of some feudal lord or other from his childhood surroundings. The fact that Conrad condemns both capitalism and socialism does not mean that he approves of the foregone state of society either -

the strife in Sulaco may well be a reflection of the strife in his Russian-oppressed native Poland.

Like their predecessors, all the characters in Nostromo wrap up their real ends in some virtuous pretence. The only exceptions perhaps are Decoud, -who is a master of the great cynical negation-, and Dr. Monygam, who has already gone through failure, shame and despair, and utterly despises all the world for its trust in its beliefs and its self-confidence -, sounding even the 'incorruptible' Nostromo for his hidden taint. Both of them see clearly what is betrayed by the serving of 'material interests', which are to lead to justice and welfare -, and which destroy Nostromo's - 'Fidanza's' - fidelity, and Mrs. Gould's love. Gould's backer, the great Holroyd, - who considers God as his 'influential partner' -, uses Gould as a tool to fight adamantly for large scale profit under the guise of pseudo-Christian, charitable, humanistic values. These are used as a disguise, but at the same time offered with some vague intention of propitiating the gods. Like Gould, Hernandez and his outlaw-peasants fight for justice, freedom and equality. Nostromo fights for honour and profit. Gould uses bribery as a means to furthering his purposes, compromises with his rigid moral principles and increases corruption. He becomes 'El Rey', king of Sulaco, but he also becomes the first slave of his mine which has already killed his father, and which now destroys the happiness and love of his devoted wife. All the great mass is cheated, for the mine exerts a subtle tyranny. Although bringing welfare, it foils the aim of their struggle. Nostromo, 'our man', 'Fidanza', the Faithful, the Incorruptible - is its first victim. He stands for the honesty and devotion of all those connected with the fate of the mine - and is corrupted first.

Fighting for honour,- to be 'well-spoken of', and material ends, he is cheated of his profit and shall be paid by honour alone - but these wages are too low. He takes what he thinks his due, and commits a transgression against a something of which he was not aware. The adorable Mrs. Gould loves to think him 'disinterested' and therefore noble in that waste of material interests, and he is so at first. Then he falls victim to the general atmosphere.

Both Gould and Nostromo have pinned their faith in 'material interests', and from this point of view they are tremendously successful. Nostromo, who 'has taken a curse upon himself with a spell on his life' (p.259), has lost his soul to the silver and thinks himself a victim of Satan. Here is Dr. Monygam's final judgment on Gould's faith:

There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle.

(Nostromo, p. 511)

Conrad's statement in the same book, concerning the glorification of material success, is made with a view to society: 'for primitives.. the recognition of success is the only standard of morality' (p.378). Gould's mine is a symbol for the rule of materialistic thought in modern society. Here is Dr. Monygam's view of its future:

..The time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and the misrule of a few years back. (p.511)

Material interests have 'turned into a fetish and now the fetish had grown into a monstrous and crushing weight, .. hateful and immense, lording it by its vast wealth over the valour, the toil, the fidelity of the poor, over war and peace, over the labours of the town, the sea, and the Campo. (p.503)



The demons created by material interests, -predominance of economic ends in society-, are the incarnations of evil in The Secret Agent, in Under Western Eyes, in Chance, in Victory. Material interests are the great affliction of modern man. By its materialistic ends, society produces a particularly infernal kind of devil, more base than the devils of nature's making. Both conspire with the forces of the universe for the downfall of man. They bring the wilderness, which had been banished in a rationalized European world, back into its very heart with all its savagery. We have the managers of trading posts, the engineers and mates of steamers. Donkin in the Nigger, Sotillo or Montero in Nostromo, or Jones in Victory and Brown in Lord Jim. By some trait or other, a club-foot, a grimace, a smile, a smell, and their allegorically repulsive looks, they are distinctly characterized as creatures of the darkness.

The revolutionaries in Geneva are 'apes of a sinister jungle'. They are 'treated as their grimaces deserve'. Their tool Nikita, 'nicknamed necator', 'is the perfect flower of the terroristic wilderness'.

Conrad's work shows that the misconception of man's nature and his employment for ends foreign to his nature lead to failure in his existence and make it appear ultimately senseless. Profit as an end in itself is incompatible with spiritual values, and the typical representatives of society, as seen from its outskirts, are barren of them.



## The Bond of the Sea.

Society is seen in contrast to the 'bond of the sea', which can master the demons because the human beings in it are in key with its organization, each filling his allotted place and leaving no gap for evil to enter. The conception of this particular form of human fellowship is in accord with the conception of the nature of its members and of their place and duty in it. Conrad's loving affection for the 'spirit of the sea' was the cause of much misinterpretation of his intentions, based in his statement in A Personal Record, that

..the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, amongst others, on the idea of Fidelity..

This has led many critics to take as a patent cure for world-wide evil what for Conrad was merely the representation of an irreparably lost stage of harmonious life. The 'children of the sea' are by-gone and vanishing already - old men. We can refer to them what Conrad said in 'H.o.D', concerning the exceptional individuals who are immune to the horrors of the universe:

Of course you may be too much of a fool to go wrong-too dull even to know you are assaulted by the powers of the darkness.. (p.132)

Even the strong MacWhirr, though admired for his strength by Jukes, is the object of constant mockery, for his incredible simplicity of mind, which ignores all the omens of the approaching Typhoon. There is a great inherent beauty in the bond of the sea, yet somehow it always lies under the shadow of the land, which makes its simplicity appear ridiculous. Here is its image in the 'Secret Sharer':

And suddenly I rejoiced in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in the choice of that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems, invested with an elementary moral beauty by the absolute straightforwardness of its appeal and by the singleness of its purpose.

The riding - light in its fore-rigging burned with a clear untroubled, as if symbolic flame, confident and bright in the mysterious shades of the night.

MacWhirr stands like a rock in the fury of the Typhoon, and Jukes is only saved by clinging to him. Nevertheless he is no match for the latter's ironic mind. Conrad's admiration is blended with mockery, and he does not consider 'the bond of the sea' as the ultimate remedy against evil. Talking about Singleton he shows that its members belong to a vanished generation:

The men who could understand his silence are gone - those men who knew how to exist beyond the pale of life and within sight of eternity.

It was a fate unique and their own; the capacity to bear it appeared to them the privilege of the chosen. Their generation lived inarticulate and indispensable, without knowing the sweetness of affections or the refuge of a home, and died free from the dark menace of a narrow grave. They were the ever lasting children of the mysterious sea.

(Nigger, p.22)

The 'children of the Sea' are patriarchs of aristocratic temperament, knights with silver-beards like breast-plates, with noble hearts and therefore out of place in the modern world. Here is Captain Whalley selling his ship 'Fair Maid':

What to the other parties was merely the sale of a ship was to him a momentous event involving a radically new view of existence.

This necessity opened his eyes to the fundamental changes in the world. Of his past only the familiar names remained, here and there, but the things and the men, as he had known them, were gone.

(The End of the Tether, p.206, p.197)

The main object of their affection is their ship,- like themselves 'unconscious and fair to see'-, their sole purpose to take it safely across the ocean to its port of destination, their reward their daily bread and the pride of mastery over the wide oceans, through the skill of their own hands. The sea never finds them off guard. The captain is an absolute ruler, the officers are his stewards. The organization of their little world is as simple as it is efficient, and based on the notions of absolute order and fidelity to duty, to the disregard of material rewards. Each depends on the other for survival, and has to fill his allotted place, thereby gaining dignity and significance.

The view of this compact and perfect little world, evidently idealised by Conrad, has inspired his best stories - Youth, Typhoon, The Shadow Line and The Secret Sharer. The complexity of the arising situation caused by the invasion of the spirit of the land, gives the Nigger a greater looseness of texture. This world has its clear wrong and right, it offers no baffling and bewildering aspects and is a coherent and meaningful whole, easy to survey. It is closely meshed in common action and tends towards a meaningful, simple purpose. It can therefore be presented through a meaningful and conclusive chain of action with a definite, meaningful and conclusive end. These stories are outstanding in Conrad's work, and from the point of view of his art, the most perfect - life seen coherently through action and character, in dramatic progression, without too much interruption and superfluous comment. As opposed to this simple vision through a simple form, we have the perplexing vision and form of books which deal with the land. The Nigger has a share of both.

The fantastically sane young Russian in 'H.o.D.', with his 'clear flame' clad like a harlequin, simple of heart and mind, is a 'brother-sailor'. His only, cherished possession, -standing for the 'spirit of the sea'-, is an old book, Towson's 'Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship'. His 'disinterestedness', though being a perfect safeguard against all dangers, is a glaring anachronism in the waste of 'material interests' surrounding him. Marlow sees him as something almost impossible. (Jim's possession is a Shakespeare-edition).

Here is Whalley at the turn of his life :

The only credentials he could produce was the testimony of his whole life. What better recommendation could any one require? But vaguely he felt that the unique document would be looked upon as an archaic curiosity of the Eastern waters, a screed traced in obsolete words - in a half-forgotten language.

(The End of the Tether, p.208)

Moral integrity is not a claim for social standing in the new era, but material success. Greed for money turns up in many forms on the sea. The celestials chase their dollars at the height of the Typhoon, on the verge of death, and MacWhirr sees a threat to his ship in that. After his arrival he distributes the dollars impartially. In the Nigger, greed creates disorder and threatens the ship by provoking the demons. It breeds selfishness and robs men of the inner stiffness to withstand the onslaught of the destructive forces surrounding them. Even the essence of stability in life, the strong captain, is not incorruptible, as the German skipper in Lord Jim or the captain in 'The Shadow Line' prove :

That man had been in all essentials but his age just such another man as myself. Yet the end of his life was a complete act of treason, the betrayal of

a tradition which seemed to me as imperative as any guide on earth could be. It appeared that even at sea a man could become the victim of evil spirits. I felt on my face the breath of unknown powers that shape our destinies.

In the contrast Massy-Whalley - a noble representative of the old order on the one hand and a vile creature of the new time on the other-, we have a typical example of the destruction of the old order by a vile offspring of the new one, which considers material profit as its greatest aim, and strives cruelly for it, anxiously however keeping up the semblance of honesty and justice to hide the depths of infamy. Dignity and merit no longer count. Whalley concludes a treaty with Massy, trusting the latter's honesty and thereby laying the foundation for his destruction. He knows the nature of man to be good -his life has taught him that - even if doing evil he means well-, and, like all patriarchs, he is completely incapable of suspecting the depth of corruption in his partner of existence. There is a benevolent Creator who loves all his children and does not allow them to perish-, and Whalley knows his place in the world and his duty. Men being good, society is equally good, judging man according to his merits and his moral integrity. It is all very simple, in contrast to reality monstrously so. But Whalley is drawn into the infernal rules of another order, outside his conception. His business has been consumed by the advent of the steamers. His invested money is now in the hands of a ruthless creature of modern stamp. Whalley is thrown on the scrap-heap of progress. Becoming invalid, he is of no more value to it, whatever his merits. He becomes odious to himself. God the universe and society become terrible



enigmas. He is thrown out of his conception of himself and of his place in the world.

The new era comes to the sea in the form of steamers and of the men serving in them. Both are black beasts when compared with the graceful white sailing-crafts and the silver-haired patriarchs. Jim is weakened and tempted on an old rusty steamer, -seen as the abode of mankind-, and Kurtz and Marlow are taken into the heart of darkness by a steamer. Marlow talks of :

..'secular trees looking patiently after this grimy fragment of another world, the forerunner of change, of conquest, of trade, of massacres, of blessings'. (Heart of Darkness, p.167)

The engine-room is a small hell with black pokers in the fiery glow of the furnace door - the motive centre of the ship. The infernal machine has taken them out of contact with the forces of the universe, and now they have to serve it, deprived of the light of the sun, of the breath of the great winds, and of the august view of the sea, toiling in stifling heat and darkness. The chant of the world's soul can no longer be heard in the spars, but now we have the steam-whistle, -the inhuman shriek of a monster- and the funnel with a black trail of smoke, instead of masts with graceful white wings. Compass and binnacle take the place of the guiding-stars, which lead men over the depths. The crew is hidden in the belly of the monster, no longer showing its skill swinging high up in the sky. The stoker in Marlow's river steamer is more terrified by the devil in the furnace than by the savages outside who threaten to take his life and are driven off by the steam-whistle. The dirty gaunt creatures of these monsters, engineers, have some infernal glitter in their eyes.

Metal is the image of corrupting progress everywhere,

of material ends, and of the age of the machine. The 'religion of silver and iron' (Nostromo, p.71) replaces hallowed loyalties. Scraps of iron, placed near the compass, wreck the spotless life of Whalley. Urged by his love for his daughter, he himself, when his eyesight is going, strives for material ends and becomes guilty. Massy the engineer provides his opportunity for him and seals his fate. 'Typhoon' is the only story where we have a positive view of such a monster - where it is made to obey the sovereign captain. Even there however, the man from the stoke-room is opposed to the sailor-bred Jukes and irritates the stolid captain by his vile speech, - an outstanding characteristic of all these creatures, and offensive to the decent sailors. In the Nigger, an iron-belaying pin is the instrument with which Donkin tries to murder Allistoun. - After it is thrown, the offensive object which would have robbed the little world of its ruling intelligence, lies at the feet of the captain, who is seen as Providence.

True enough, the machine stands between nature's might and man, but it entails great dangers, making man its slave and robbing him of the freedom necessary to fulfil his true destiny. On the one hand it makes life easier, but on the other, it weakens the strength necessary to face the powers of the universe, giving man more profit for less toil and increasing his greed, as the example of Jim shows. Its servants like easy jobs and are made 'soft' by them - honesty and fidelity to duty, if they are in the way of profit, must give way, and they would even 'serve the devil himself'. Inertia and dodging, the mortal sins in the eternal struggle of life against chaos, raise their head.

In the Nigger, we have for the first time a concen-

trated image of the new ideas of social revolution, which help to destroy the old order of things, being the outcome of the economic ends of society. They are the notions of social equality based on material equality, -of a classless society-, as opposed to an order that is built on efficiency and skill and brains, -on merits and spiritual values. In one short passage these aspirations are judged and condemned. They have destroyed the satisfaction of the crew with their present lot, -and almost their lives-, making them aspire to things which are beyond their reach and capabilities :

On deck the men exchanged bitter words, suggested by a silly exasperation against something unjust and irremediable that would not be denied, and would whisper into their ears long after Donkin had ceased speaking. Our little world went on its curved and unswerving path carrying a discontented and aspiring population. They found comfort of a gloomy kind in an interminable and conscientious analysis of their unappreciated worth; and inspired by Donkin's hopeful doctrines they dreamed enthusiastically of the time when every lonely ship would travel over a serene sea manned by a wealthy and well-fed crew of satisfied skippers. (p.77)

Obviously the crew is an image of society. The implication is that these aspirations are as little likely to be realised as the great sea will ever be permanently serene, without its tempests and gales which can only be mastered by the best. This form of society, as is implied by the whole book, could not master the demons but would provoke them. They can only be overcome by a crew classed by its value of inner stiffness and strength and skill.

Here is another view of the crew in mutiny, -seen as mankind :

.. an immense and lamentable murmur, the murmur of

millions of lips praying, cursing, sighing, jeering - the undying murmur of folly, regret, and hope exhaled by the crowds of the anxious earth. (p.121)

.. they appeared to be creatures of another kind -lost, alone, forgetful, and doomed : they were like castaways making merry in the storm and upon an insecure ledge of a treacherous rock. (p.126)

The promise of profit and of progress, of social equality and freedom for all, does not touch the pure and guileless hearts of the patriarchs. The old captains cannot understand the new order of things, it is inconceivable for them, -the essence of evil-. Lingard stands just as bewildered before Willems' betrayal as Whalley before his own guilt and death.

You are not fit to go amongst people. Who could suspect, who could guess, who could imagine what's in you? I couldn't. You are my mistake. I shall hide you here.

You are not a human being that may be destroyed or forgiven. You are a bitter thought, a something without a body and that must be hidden .. You are my shame. (Outcast, p.275)

That thing to the patriarchs is 'something that cannot be grappled, that never rests - a shadow, a nothing, unconquerable and immortal, that preys upon life.' (p.23)

Lingard, who stands for his kind, has a 'stupidly guileless heart, and absurd faith in himself, a universal love of creation, a wide self-indulgence, a contemptuous severity, a straightforward simplicity of motive and honesty of aim' (p.13), an 'infernal charity' (p.161), -but only on the grounds of 'a simple, ill-informed mind' (p.198). For that reason :

his experience appeared to him immense and conclusive, teaching him the lesson of the simplicity of life. In life - as in seamanship- there were only two ways of



doing a thing : the right way and the wrong way (p.199)

To Conrad, they seem admirable and childish alike - but they can by no means solve the problems of modern existence. There is no going back.

The struggle between darkness and light in the universe is concentrated like a point of fire in the souls of the central characters in Conrad's work. It is the clash of an ideal conception of man and of the world with the reality of life, the downfall of the dream, -the revelation of the truth-, which is the theme of paramount importance. On the whole, it is the representation of the eternal fearful struggle of incompatible forces in the human soul. The earth and the human soul are the battle-field of savage instincts and of the spirit. In Freudian terms this is the permanent struggle of the Id against the Super-Ego. In the Nigger or in Victory it is split up allegorically in many persons. Conrad repeatedly makes it clear, that the most permanent element of human nature is the savage instincts of primitive man. 'Heart of Darkness' is the most evident illustration. They are controlled and held at bay by a strict order of conduct. By making 'material interests' its idols and setting them on the altar of progress, modern society - being held captive by a spell- ('H-o.D.', p.107) has betrayed all its traditional, spiritual values, and has created an outlet for the demons which tend towards the destruction of civilisation. Such is the spirit of perdition, which the younger generation, -being children of that society-, carry in their very hearts. It finds its incarnation in the devils who conspire with the demons of the universe against the noble ones, who carry the germ of destruction, unknown, in their hearts.



If we make an attempt to outline this conflict of forces we get the following picture :

<u>Nature,</u>					
Wilderness,					
Savages,	>	Instincts	Victim	Vague Dream	The Sea
Conspiracy		ID	E G O	SUPER-EGO	< Patriarchs
=====		==	=====	=====	
^					
<u>Society,</u>	>	Rotten Spot	Battle-ground	Fidelity	Home
Progress,		Selfishness		to Duty,	
Material Interests,				Courage,	
Devils.				Honesty.	

The heroes are invariably accompanied by a Patriarch - a man of the sea - from Lingard in Almayer, to Mitchell in Nostromo, or McWhirr in 'Typhoon', and Davidson in Victory-. In the conclusive stories they are the greatest hold, in the ones with the central doubt, objects of the worst betrayal. They are incapable of seeing evil. Lingard looks through Willems after the betrayal, and Babalatchi is an impotent cur for him. Captain Whalley is incapable of perceiving the infamous corruption of Massy, -his greed for his money-, just as Captain Mitchell cannot conceive the imbecile ferocity of Sotillo, the savage ape who takes his gold chronometer from him - image of the bond he belongs to, and of his dignity and merits. Donkin in the Nigger is 'a startling visitor from a world of nightmares' (p.12) is called 'a thing' by Singleton (p.47), who is 'incomprehensible and exciting, like an oracle' :

Singleton peered downwards with puzzled attention (at Donkin), as though he couldn't find him.

'Damn you!' he said, vaguely, giving it up. He radiated unspeakable wisdom, hard unconcern, the chilling air of resignation. (p.96)

.. at last he (Donkin) appeared alone before the master as though he had come up through the deck ..

They were much of a size, and at short range the master exchanged a deadly glance with the beady eyes.. (p.100)

Donkin, turning his back fairly, ran off a little, then stopped and over his shoulder showed yellow teeth. (p.101)

This is a typical gesture of the devils in Conrad's books. If Allistoun is seen to stand for the uncurbing will, Singleton for simple devotion to duty, Donkin for evil greed, the Nigger must be inertia - image of the power of the soul which paralyses the will and shirks all action, the mortal foe in the pitch of the struggle. The crew is swayed by fear between the two groups -the master, his officers and Singleton on the one hand, Donkin and the Nigger on the other. However much admiration may have been shed on the spotless and guileless patriarchs with their knight's hearts, they are also ridiculous. They are no match for the devils, nor for the spirit of perdition which lingers in the very air of modern times, and they cannot protect their wards from it either.

Witnessing this scene of the struggle, there is always the author in some guise or other, the 'man of the spectacular universe', or 'the man of sensations', pointing out its 'facts' through a current layer of ironic and often sarcastic comment. Shining through this irony, and disguised by it, is a profound feeling of pity for the victims of the spectacle.

As we have pointed out already, the victory of darkness is prepared by society, which on the one hand seems to ignore the dark powers, wrapping its real motives up in virtuous pretences, and on the other hand makes use of them for its 'progress' and existence. It does not take the dark side of the universe and human nature into account,

and yet at the same time allows them to serve its ends, which are other than they seem. The men at the heart of Conrad's tales have started their life with an excessively romantic dream and a lofty conception of themselves. It is the very cause of their inevitable doom. Built on the hollow virtues of society, it is unattainable because starting from unreal premises. They go out to the sea and to the outskirts of European civilization, being shown as its typical children, to find their great opportunity there. They think themselves to be made of the stuff of heroes, -not knowing the dark realities inside. They have too much imagination but not enough fibre to exist in the life of their choice. Their romantic approach to its reality makes them incapable of assessing and judging the true nature of its facts, -and they are too soft to meet them when the necessity arises unawares. Lack of judgment, self-indulgence, selfishness, a typical lack of restraint, make them cast off the bonds of duty, loyalty and affection.

When they are brought into contact with the wilderness and its solitude, the memories of home, of the virtues and of great words become more and more unreal. All around them however the darkness rears its head, in a fearful set of infernal circumstances, and nothing stands between them and perdition now but their own will and the stiffness of the values they have imbibed. They find themselves between two fires. A powerful ally to the darkness outside unexpectedly raises its head inside them, and makes the memories and the awe of the virtues recede further and further. There is a fearful struggle between will and passion, and they fall prey to the greater fear, being neither trained to see dangers nor steeled to fight them. Suddenly they find themselves on the same

level as beasts and devils. They do not recognise what is visible in their appearance even at the very beginning, -their familiar devil, their shadow, their cloud, the night side of their selves. All that till then was abominable and infamous, they find in themselves - but cannot bring this new reality into accordance with their ideal values, and trying to save their moral integrity from the fire. But they have fallen into an abyss - their spirit is mortally wounded. (His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines. 'H.o.D!', p.168) As they can never now be what they wanted to be, they're beyond redemption. By their fall, they have severed the bonds with humanity, and the only way to regain their self, -that is their dream-, nothing being left inside them, seems to be the recovery of the lost respect of humanity, -the striving anew for the aspired honour-. For a while it seems that it is not the guilt that matters so much for them, but the honour they have lost, -their disgrace, the loss of the image of their moral integrity and excellence in the eyes of their fellowmen. They remain essentially unsound, of a sublime selfishness. At the moment when, after 'desire and temptation', the 'surrender' (H.o.D., p.168) happens, the very aspect of the universe changes for them, -it shows its real face, that of enormous monsters surrounding their lives. Cruel forces of relentless retribution set to work on them. On the verge of the civilised world, in complete loneliness and isolation, they are hunted down by human enmity and their own remorse, -punished by a sense of betrayal, failure, guilt and doom. Often they remain unrepentant sinners almost to the bitter end, blaming their failure on men universe and God, feeling themselves punished excessively for a slight

transgression and therefore convinced of their 'inner blamelessness'. They disappear in the darkness. Being what they really are, they are hopelessly overmatched in their fateful, lonely struggle against the wilderness. At the moment of their disappearance they have a chance to confess the truth, -that which the 'adventures of their soul on this earth' made them 'see' : the Secret of Hearts. It is the 'horror' of their crime, and through the admission of it, the existence of the spirit in them, which they have mortally wounded. They have ignored it because of their allegiance to the false tenets of society, and they have mortally wounded it because they have allowed themselves to be used to ends foreign to their true nature and destiny, raising matter to an idol above the spirit. They come to realize the true nature of human existence through a crashing shock to which the universe resounds.

All this makes it quite clear that Conrad did not pick characters or episodes and tales of hearsay for the sake of entertaining action, but exclusively with a view to his main concern : a study in their psychology , with the aim of illustrating his truth.

Of course there are men of action, but they also fail ultimately. They are men like McWhirr, without any marked characteristics or particular distinctions, with just enough imagination to carry them through each successive day of their existence, -enough to enable them to recognise the surface of facts, and a mysteriously safe instinct to handle them efficiently, to 'do the right thing at the right moment unthinkingly', like animals with an unfailing instinct. But they never realise the horrors under the surface and they are ultimately not safe from them either - there is not the greatness of the



foolish dream in them and they are treated with kind irony. They are the men however who vouchsafe the existence and survival of humanity in the merciless struggle against the powers of the deep - if only for the reason that they cannot see them and magnify them through their imagination, thus not being led astray nor weakened by the vagaries of fear.

## 5. The Forces against Despair.

### Love.

Affection and love cannot thrive in the shadow of the dark and threatening cloud that hangs over each individual destiny in Conrad's world. It is a man's world, determined by ecological factors alone, -material interests-, which do not know the human heart, and drive it to despair.

Life as seen in Conrad's fiction is of symbiotic character throughout. Interhuman relationships are not ruled by love and affection, charity, pity or sympathy. They are dictated by the cruel necessities of the struggle for existence. In their face the former are but fatal weaknesses. From the beginning the typical characters are torn from their 'sympathetic' surroundings, from 'home', and thrown into a world of hostile strangers with the most varied modes of thought and feeling -benevolent, venerable patriarchs, mean rascals, cannibals - men black, brown, yellow and white, -inside and outside-. His men at sea know homes but from afar. His typical characters have nondescript professions, although often being brought up on the sea, and are mostly loafers, wanderers, pilgrims, without any ties, and even intentionally avoid them. As Conrad's world is void of laughter, mirth and happiness, so it is almost void of love, affection, sympathy and pity. Outwardly, every sign of feeling and emotion is seen as through a glassy distance - most of his male characters are unable of profound affection and of sufficient trust in the affection of others. Being too much concerned with themselves they are inarticulate as to their

feelings towards others. His lovers mostly approach the objects of their love like 'knights their maidens', from Jim to Anthony, and for Heyst at the side of Lena 'the physical and moral imperfection of their relation' is always there and never overcome (Victory, p.224). F.R. Leavis holds that Conrad saw woman through the simple and gallant mind of the sailor :

Like a beautiful and unscrupulous woman, the sea of the past was glorious in its smiles, irresistible in its anger, capricious, enticing, illogical, irresponsible; a thing to love, a thing to fear.

But its cruelty was redeemed by the charm of its inscrutable mystery, by the immensity of its promise, by the supreme witchery of its possible favour.  
(Outcast, p.72)

A remark of Conrad to Garnett proves that the handling of women - characters was a life-long difficulty for him, and that he preferred the man's world :

.. the 'Secret Sharer', between you and me, is it. Eh? No damned tricks with girls there. Eh? Every word fits and there's not a single uncertain note.  
(Letters, 5th Nov., 1912, p.263)

Woman seems to form part and parcel of the amazing complications the land offers to the man of the sea, -as best shown in Chance -, and there is always the suspicion that her presentation in his books was largely a concession to his readers. Like all the other things which Conrad does not comprehend woman is 'inscrutable, unfathomable, mysterious' etc. Willem expounds on the theme:

We can tell what's inside their heads? No one. You can know nothing. The only thing you can know that is is not like what comes through their lips.

They seem to hate you, or they seem to love you; they caress and torment you; they throw you over or stick to you closer than your skin for some inscrutable and awful reason of their own - which you can never know ...  
(Outcast, p.268)

Marlow ascribes 'an extra-terrestrial touch' to them in Jim and asks :

I ask myself with wonder - how the world can look to them - whether it has the shape and substance we know, the air we breathe! Sometimes I fancy it must be a region of unreasonable sublimities seething with the excitement of their adventurous souls, lighted by the glory of all possible risks and renunciations. (p.203)

Looking into jewel's eyes (Jim's girl) he asks himself what 'moves there?' 'Is it a blind monster or only a lost gleam of the universe'. Then he compares her with a 'Sphinx propounding childish riddles to wayfarers'. (p.203)

.. all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident and trustful. (H.o.D., p.177)

This explains why Conrad never really could draw full and real woman-characters. They always remain pale and translucent, angelic and statuesque, with the hint of a halo or the wings of an angel, in fleeting white gowns, - with perhaps the exception of Mrs.Gould-. Somehow they remain out of key with the man's world, following rules and values of their own. In Jim Marlow lets us know that woman's world is something hopelessly at variance with the rules of reality. If it was realised, it would crumble in a day. In 'Heart of Darkness' he states ironically :

They - the women I mean - are out of it - should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse. (p.130)

It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too

beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset.  
(p.67)

The discrepancy enormous and shocking between their world and reality is brought out most strongly and sarcastically in the attitude of Kurtz's 'Intended' in the face of his presumed manner of death.

At the beginning of Conrad's work love wears the desperate shape of betrayal. Woman is evil, provoking 'the devil of hot desire', passion, and is made use of by the powers of the dark. Hot desire weakens the victims, - in *Almayer* or *Outcast* or *Lagoon*-, luring men away from their duties and as such proving a destructive force which provokes and helps the demons. The superb savage woman in '*Heart of Darkness*', who had gained mastery over him and dragged him into unspeakable depravity,<sup>is</sup> opposed to Kurtz's 'Intended', -with 'a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal'- (p.171). She is seen as the very soul of the wilderness when she comes to claim Kurtz from the white men on the boat, accompanied by three red devils with horns.

From the Malayan phase onwards there is a constant increase of the positive influence of the ties of affection and of women in Conrad's fiction. True enough, love remains man's greatest folly because it is the greatest creator of illusions, and the oracle Stein exclaims in Lord Jim :

'Friend, child, wife', he said, slowly, gazing at the small flame -'phoo!' The match was blown out.  
(p.154)

Nevertheless, Mrs. Gould, Antonia Avellanosa and the daughters of old Viola at least equal the man's world. Although Mrs. Gould, as the weight in balance on the scales with the silver, is the losing part, still she is more



the centre of the book, and receives more real and valuable devotion. Winnie Verloc and Lena are in fact and in Conrad's intention the centres of the fates connected with them, like Flora de Barral. Natalie Haldin is opposed to Razumov as an equal weight, and through his love to her the guilt of his betrayal is ultimately exorcised. The demands of love and affection remain however incompatible with the necessities of the great struggle. From the beginning, there is a momentary effort to put absolute trust and surrender in love, to escape the infernal snares of the wilderness, but it fails, -in Almayer, Willems, or Whalley :

What if he should suddenly take her to his heart, forget his shame, and pain, and anger, and -follow her! .. What if he should say that his love for her was greater than .. leaping up madly in sudden fear of his dream ..  
(Almayer, p.192)

For a moment, in an access of despair so profound that it seemed like the beginning of peace, he planned the deliberate descent from his pedestal, the throwing away of his superiority, of all his hopes, of old ambitions, of the ungrateful civilisation. For a moment, forgetfulness in her arms seemed possible.  
(Outcast, p.307)

From Lord Jim onwards woman is set in irreconcilable enmity against the spirit of perdition. 'You always leave us', jewel says, 'for your own ends' :

'He was made blind and deaf and without pity, as you all are. He shall have no tears from me. Never, never. Not one tear. I will not. He went away from me as if he had been driven by worse than death. He fled as if driven by some accursed thing. he had heard or seen in his dream ..'  
(p.256)

The impotence of love set against 'material interests' and its demons is best seen in the relationship man-wife. Its perfection was possible in the old world, -it had its proper place as the example of Whalley or the old Garibaldino proves. The picture of Whalley's dead wife

hangs in his sanctuary, his cabin, and he converses with her. Its disappearance with his lovely ship, -the 'Fair Maid'-, when he is thrown onto the scrap-heap of progress, is symbolic. He perishes because he fails to put sufficient trust in the love of his daughter. Nostromo leaves Donna Theresa, who adopted him as her son, on her deathbed, refusing to get a priest for her. Instead he goes away to drift with a load of silver into the dark gulf and to perish over it, feeling guilty all the time for his refusal to grant her request.

Seeming to be creatures full of light, and not of flesh and blood, women are set against the darkness, -sometimes utterly ignorant of it by their faith and absolute devotion to their love. Often however, they see clearly through the danger and the destructiveness of the dark powers, keeping a strong hand over the object of their love. Neither can Winnie Verloc, whose motherly love had been fixed, to the point of complete self-sacrifice, on her brother Stevie, save him from destruction, -nor can Mrs. Gould dam the force of the silver. She loses her own love, and yet she keeps a propitiating and saving hand over those she loves. She saves Dr. Monygam from his profound misery and pardons Nostromo. Flora's and Anthony's love is foiled for many years by the demon de Barral, who is protected by his daughter in spite of his infernal meanness. The first victory for love in the face of destruction is Linda's final cry of faith in Nostromo, darting high over the dark gulf like the rays from the light-house.

In Victory, Lena is set against the incarnation of evil, Jones, a skeleton with a destructive hand. He calls himself, in an allusion to God's name in the Old Testament, 'He, who is'. She takes the fate of Heyst, -the man who

is unable to resist the forces of evil- in her hands and defeats evil, which destroys itself. Conrad evidently aimed at representing her as an ideal incarnation of woman. Heyst 'crossed the path of the girl they had called Alma - she didn't know why - also Magdalen, whose mind had remained so long in doubt as to the reason of her own existence. She no longer wondered at that bitter riddle since her heart had found its solution in a blinding, hot glow of passionate purpose' (p.370). By the contact with Lena, 'Heyst's negations fell off one by one', and he is gradually led to reconsider and then to drop his whole conception of life, as imposed on him by his father and cultivated by him throughout his life. In his position, abstention from action, -resignation to mere observation of the spectacle of life-, is just as bad and worse than action itself.

Mr.Jones hates and fears women,-he considers them as the greatest possible danger for people of his kind, the danger he cannot cope with. He is evil intelligence acting through savage instincts, -Ricardo and the ape Pedro-. Through an act of absolute love Lena wrings his tools out of his hands and saves Heyst, but too late :

At the moment of her death 'Heyst bent low over her, cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of life. He dared not touch her, and she had no longer the strength to throw her arms about his neck.  
(p.409)

The great affliction of the world makes it barren of love, -a waste arid of the true warmth of life-, but it is seen here as the only force which defeats evil bare-handed, though in a rather melodramatic manner. Even at the moment of its triumph it is not able to break into the arid heart.

Heyst, the man with the philosophical father,  
spoke for Conrad too when saying :

'Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love - and to put its trust in life!'

(Victory, p.413)

## Religion.

Religion, the other great force counter-acting despair and the invasion of the demons, - by giving man the means to invoke the help of God against the evils of this world, and by placing his salvation and final redemption in the hope for a better world, the beyond -, is the subject of the most acrid sarcasm in Conrad. Without it, there cannot possibly be an explanation for the mysterious fact of evil, unless the whole of life is seen as void of reason, - and that is the ultimate result of Conrad's refutation. In spite of his global negation however, Conrad renders the central aspects of human existence in religious terms, bringing all their complex spiritual meaning to bear on his cases. At the core of things there is always 'the struggle of a soul'. Religious terms are there first of all in the allegory of the fall of man in a Paradise. Hervey in 'Return' is seen as the 'High Priest' of Society:

The walls of his house seemed to enclose the sacredness of ideals to which he was about to offer a magnificent sacrifice. He was the high priest of that temple, the severe guardian of formulas, of rites, of the pure ceremonial concealing the black doubts of life. And he was not alone. Other men, too - the best of them - kept watch and word by the hearth-stones that were the altars of that profitable persuasion. (p.155)

In this context he speaks of 'exertions of apostates' and of the 'weariness of confessors'. These terms are evidently used as a strand in the ironic layer of comment which is always there in Conrad's work, but even so by their persistence they cast a strong spiritual flavour over the scene.

The theme of the fall of man is most elaborately rendered in the Outcast:

Knowing nothing of Arcadia - he dreamed of Arcadian happiness for that little corner of the world.. (p.200)



He said slowly: 'You have been possessed of a devil!' 'Yes,' answered Willems gloomily, and looking at Aissa. 'Isn't it pretty?' (p.173)

The doer of justice sat with compressed lips and a heavy heart, while in the calm darkness outside the silent world seemed to be waiting breathlessly for that justice he held in his hand - in his strong hand: - ready to strike - reluctant to move. (p.224)

After the fall of Willems and the departure of Lingard there is a deluge-like rainfall. Willems watches Lingard depart:

And he stood in sullen silence looking at the white figure over there, lying back in the chair in the middle of the boat; a figure that struck him suddenly as very terrible, heartless and astonishing, with its unnatural appearance of running over the water in an attitude of languid repose. (282)

Here is Willems craving for an outlet from his terrible plight: The last cry of his appeal to her mercy rose loud, vibrated under the sombre canopy, darted among the boughs startling the white birds that slept wing to wing - and died without an echo, strangled in the dense mass of un-stirring leaves. (p.154)

After Lingard's departure Willems shows a

..reckless contempt for everything outside himself - in a savage disdain of Earth and Heaven. He said to himself that he would not repent. The punishment for his only sin was too heavy. There was no mercy under Heaven. (p.338)

Willems' rival Almayer mocks the poor sinner:

'Where are you, Willems? ..Hey..? Where there is no mercy for you - I hope!' 'Hope,' repeated in a whispering echo the startled forests, the river and the hills; and Almayer, who stood waiting, with a smile of tipsy attention on his lips, heard no other answer. (p.368)

Almayer talks to a drunken countryman:

'Where's the sense of all this? Where's your Providence? Where's the good for anybody in all this? The world's a swindle! a swindle! Why should I suffer? What have I done to be treated so?'

He hurled out his string of questions.. 'My dear fellow, don't - don't you see that the ba- bare fact the fact of your existence is off- offensive.(p.367)

Faith in a benevolent Creator is an essential constituent of the character of the Patriarchs. In a way, they stand for Providence themselves. Playing a hand however in life's cruel game for justice and mercy, they pave the way for the destruction of their adopted children. They make a mess of it as the Creator seems to have made 'a pretty mess of his most precious job'.

Podmore in the Nigger is a cruel joke at the expense of the narrow believer. He bullies the Nigger, for God's sake, and nearly frightens him to death, as Donkin succeeds shortly after for the devil's sake. Essentially religion, whether Christian or not, is seen as mere prejudice which leads to destruction. It is not in accordance with reality. There is no God, or his face is turned away from creation and his children, abandoning it to evil.

The assumption of a divine benevolence is constantly treated, with bitter exasperation, as the 'Great Joke', - seen from the fact that the world and man is abandoned to the powers of the dark. In Almayer Abdullah comes to see his dead enemy, starved physically and spiritually in an ignoble manner, and while walking away from his carcass, lying in front of the Chinese opium-hovel with <sup>the</sup> crazy-looking maze of the Chinese inscription on the red silk: House of heavenly delight: (Alm. p.205)

..the beads in Abdullah's hand clicked, while in a solemn whisper he breathed out piously the name of Allah! The Merciful! The Compassionate! (p.208)

There are the Idiots, with their father cursing and provoking God at the door of the church:

They lived on that road, drifting along its length here and there, according to the inexplicable impulses

of their monstrous darkness. They were an offence to the sunshine, a reproach to empty heaven, a blight on the concentrated and purposeful vigour of the wild landscape.

(p.58)

There's no mercy in heaven - no justice.

(p.75)

And here we have the end of the Idiots:

The sea-winds coming ashore--fresh from the fierce turmoil of the waves, howled violently at the unmoved heaps of black boulders holding up steadily short-armed, high crosses against the tremendous rush of the invisible. On starry night .. the bay .. resembled an immense black pit, from which ascended mutterings and sighs as if the sands down there had been alive and complaining.

(p.171)

This is the spot where the final act takes place, the edge of the gulf, where some unquestionable damnation takes place, where the mother of the unhappy children drowns herself after having murdered their father:

Far below he saw the water whitened by her struggles, and heard one shrill cry for help that seemed to dart upwards along the prependicular face of the rock, and soar past, straight into the high and impassive heaven.

(p.84)

The yells and the clamour of the savages in 'H.O.D.', seen as the first men 'taking possession of their accursed inheritance', have a note of wild sorrow and complaint, over the state they are thrown into.

The subtle and terrible affliction of man is a frequent theme in modern literature, and we can find many examples of the terrible annihilation of a human soul in the face of a cold heaven. Franz Kafka e.g. thought his short-story 'Das Urteil' his best story. Its protagonist is doomed to death without any real motivation and leaps from a bridge into a river, after his father has revealed the real motives of all his acts to him and sentenced him to this death. The terrible emptiness of heaven lies like a crushing weight in the last sentence. He is just extinguished and mocked at:

'In diesem Augenblick ging über die Brücke ein nahezu unendlicher Verkehr.'  
(p.22)

Dostojewski provides another example in 'Der Doppelgänger', where the protagonist is sent to Siberia without any real motivation, - to a slow, dreadful death: The last sentence:

Die Antwort kam streng und furchtbar wie ein Urteilsspruch. Unser Held schrie auf und griff sich an den Kopf. O weh, das hatte er schon längst geahnt.  
(p.204)

Kafka's saying from his 'Aphorismen' explains his own attitude and sums up one aspect of Conrad's work: 'Sündig ist der Stand, in dem wir uns befinden, unabhängig von Schuld.'

We have the same sarcasm, which we found in the Idiots, in the 'Outpost'. Kayerts had walked out to see the cross on the grave of their predecessor and tells his fellow: 'I suspended myself with both hands to the cross-piece. Not a move.'  
(p.95) After he has run into trouble it was:

..as if the whole land had been one immense drum booming out steadily an appeal to heaven. (p.99)

He groped his way through the fog, calling in his ignorance upon the invisible heaven to undo its work.

Kayerts stood still. He looked upwards; the fog rolled low over his head. He looked round like a man who has lost his way; and he saw a dark smudge, a cross-shaped stain upon the shifting purity of the mist. As he began to stumble towards it, the station bell rang in a tumultuous peal...  
(116)

Kayerts was hanging from the cross. His toes were only a couple of inches above the ground ; his arms hung stiffly down; he seemed to be standing rigidly at attention but with one purple cheek playfully posed on the shoulder.  
(p.117)

This 'groping' through the fog' is typical of the victims of 'the Great Joke', once they 'have lost their way'. The cross but leads to death here, and is impotent in the face of evil. The most bitter, and from the point of view



of fiction, greatest 'Joke' we have in 'H.o.D!': the shrunken heads of the victims of Kurtz's orgies, drying in the glaring sunlight, result of his craving to carry light and virtue into the darkness:

..There it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids - a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and, with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of teeth, was smiling too, smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber.

(p.147)

Satan rules the world with his devils in many shapes. It is hell. Even in the temporary paradise there are the dark streams, and serpents; there is a gulf between two mountains in Jim's 'Patusan', and a volcano in Heyst's 'Samburan'. It literally becomes hell in 'H.o.D.' Men in it are 'wandering and tormented things'(p.162,H.o.D.) lost souls, wandering and drifting around amidst terrible dangers and crying in vain for mercy. Their sins seem beyond redemption. They are mere phantoms like Kurtz:

He rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent before me... (p.161)

Man is dust, 'a handful of dust', and shall become dust again, in spite of his 'spirit'. There is no God to redeem him from his state. The world gives the lie to Providence - it is a terrible machine which has made itself, and man is the worst job in it - because he has a heart to feel and a mind to see what infernal nonsense the whole show is.

Linda's cry from the lighthouse - image of her heart above the dark gulf where sin and downfall and perdition have taken place - must be seen as the same kind of outcry against universal doom, - against the great infernal affliction of man and creation - the constant turning of matter and man, without consideration of merit, birth, guilt or innocence, into cold, darkness and chaos.



In Lord Jim we have, in Marlow's friend, to whom is imparted the final truth about Jim's fate, the image of the poet looking out upon the world from his 'lighthouse', which sends its rays out for guiding the world:

The privileged man opened the packet, looked in, then, laying it down, went to the window. His rooms were in the highest flat of a lofty building, and his glance could travel afar beyond the clear panes of glass, as though he were looking out of the lantern of a lighthouse. The slopes of the roofs glistened, the dark broken ridges succeeded each other without end like sombre, uncrested waves, and from the depths of the town under his feet ascended a confused and unceasing mutter. The spires of churches, numerous, scattered haphazard, up-rose like beacons on a maze of shoals without a channel; The driving rain mingled with the falling dusk of a winter's evening; and the booming of a clock on a tower striking the hour, rolled past in voluminous, austere bursts of sound, with a shrill vibrating cry at the core.

(p.248)

The churches are beacons on shoals without channels, and therefore leading astray.

The conception of the world and of man in Conrad's work can be taken as an excellent illustration of some lines of the Old Testament:

22. And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever:

23. Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the earth from whence he was taken.

24. So he drove out the man;...

14. And the LORD God said unto the serpent,...

15. I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

16. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow.

17. And unto Adam he said, .. cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou of it all the days of thy life..

18. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.  
(Genesis, chapt. 3)

Death and the knowledge of good and evil are the curses which Conrad's heroes reap as a fruit for their sin. The earth is accursed for them, and they are beset by Satan. But there is also the 'dream', the inner knowledge of a lost and unattainable paradise, which they have forfeited, and the awareness of a greater destiny than sordid toil for mere existence. There is evidence that Conrad knew this part of the Bible well and had it at the back of his mind when creating his fiction. He wrote to Cunningham Graham:

Fraternity means nothing, unless the Cain-Abel business.  
(Febr. 8, 99, Aubry II, P.269)

There is the constant betrayal of a brother in his early work, and there are the shouts which Jim hears after his transgression, and the phantoms which haunt the old engineer. There are the children of Cain, and they are painted black, and the children of Seth, and they are painted white. The passages on the 'Cain-Abel business in Genesis' are a concentrated definition of the basic state of man in Conrad's world:

9. And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

10. And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood cries unto me from the ground.

11. And now art thou cursed from the earth..

12. When thou tillest the ground, it shall not hence-force yield unto<sup>thee</sup> strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

13. And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

14. Behold, thou hast driven me out of this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth..

15. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain..

16. And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD..

The New Testament is for Conrad an 'absurd oriental fable', a 'priceless legend', and there is no redemption for his sinners. The only salvation from their plight is their 'own inborn strength', and that is hopelessly over-matched. Man is unredeemably fallen, but he stubbornly persists in his struggle, facing this truth.

A statement in a letter to Garnett would seem to sum up his attitude towards religion:

'But generally I feel like the impenitent thief on the cross (he is one of my early heroes) - defiant and bitter. (Letters from Conrad, 11th June, 1897, p.84)

### CHAPTER III.

#### FALLEN MAN.

##### 1. Man

Man is the victim of the horrible suspicion which Conrad casts over the whole of creation : that it does not stand to reason, that it is a terrible and cruel machine, grinding suffering hearts between its pitiless wheels to excesses of pain and suffering, to no purpose whatever.

Man on this earth is an unforeseen accident which does not stand close investigation. (Victory, p.221)

Stein, depicted as the wisdom of this world, or perhaps even as Providence, in any case as Conrad's oracle in Lord Jim, states :

'Man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece', he said, .. 'Perhaps the artist was a little mad. Eh? What do you think? Sometimes it seems to me that man is come where he is not wanted, where there is no place for him; for if not, why should he want all the place? Why should he run about here and there making a great noise about himself, talking about the stars, disturbing the blades of grass?' (p.152)

.. he wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil - and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow - so fine as he can never be .. In a dream ...' (p.155)

'And because you not always can keep your eyes shut there comes the real trouble - the heart pain - the world pain. I tell you, my friend, it is not good for you to find you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough are, or not clever enough. Ja! ... and all the time you are such a fine fellow, too! ... How can that be? Ha!ha!ha!' (p.156)

This is Conrad's image of man - or rather of the kind

of man that fascinates him - a creature hopelessly out of place in this world, with no place in the order of things. The 'world pain', the terrible affliction of our star, is Conrad's obsession - crystallised in the heart of a particular kind of human being. 'He is romantic - romantic, ' he (Stein) repeated. 'And that is very bad - very bad ... Very good, too'. (p.158) This quality singles Jim, the 'erring spirit, a suffering and nameless shade' (p.157) out from innumerable other shadows, makes him 'exist', makes him 'be', though he is 'blurred by crowds of men as by clouds of dust, silenced by the clashing claims of life and death in a material world' (p.158). To Marlow, through this trait 'his imperishable reality came with a convincing, with an irresistible force' (p.158).

In the Patna-affair Conrad saw 'an event, which could conceivably colour the whole 'sentiment of existence' in a simple and sensitive character ...':

As a matter of principle I will have no favourites; but I don't go so far as to feel grieved and annoyed by the preference some people give to my Lord Jim. I won't even say I fail to understand ... One sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by - appealing - significant - under a cloud - perfectly silent. It was for me, with all the sympathy, of which I was capable, to seek fit words for his meaning. He was 'one of us'.  
(Preface, p.2)

Jim is 'spotlessly neat, appavelled in immaculate white from shoes to hat'- he 'advanced straight at you' (not slyly like the devils). He has 'the advantage of being brought up on the sea', he has 'ability in the abstract' (p.3); he is criticised because of his 'exquisite sensibility' (p.4), his occupation as a water-clerk is



'beautiful and humane', he deals in 'everything to make a ship seaworthy and beautiful, from a set of chainhooks for her cable to a book of gold-leaf for the carvings of her stern.

.. there were his fine sensibilities, his fine feelings, his fine longings - a sort of sublimated, idealized selfishness. He was - if you allow me to say so - very fine; very fine - and very unfortunate. A little coarser nature would not have borne the strain; it would have had to come to terms with itself - with a sigh, with a grunt, or even with a guffaw; a still coarser one would have remained invulnerably ignorant and completely uninteresting. (p.130)

✓ Lord Jim, with a noble attribute like 'Baron' Heyst, is 'one of us', a 'symbol of mankind'. His forerunner is Marlow of 'Youth'; Jim in his manhood is Nostromo, 'our man', with the surname Fidanza, 'the faithful one, the Incorruptible', and Heyst is Jim grown-up. All of them were youngsters on the sea, are 'one of us', and share certain characteristics.

Jim is an 'imaginative beggar', he has the quality which makes Stein 'be', which makes him look after Jim, -just like Marlow, who is fascinated by it and shares it. It lifts them all out of the insignificant and dull run of everyday affairs and sets Marlow, the would-be sailor, apart from his profession. It is the man with the mind of an artist, cutting out a great fate for himself, which cannot be his because of the clay he is made of, and creating an imaginary world hopelessly at variance with the waste of 'material interests'. His splendid flights of fancy take him into an element in which he cannot live - for 'a man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns'. (p.156)

Looking above and striving too high to reach his exalted dream, man cannot grasp his opportunities in a material world. He cannot swim properly, nor can he fly - what would seem to be his true element, does not carry him.

The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hand and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up ... In the destructive element immerse ... (p.156)

In other words - give up your dream and your lofty conception of yourself, and act as best you can in this world - see the world in its true, bitter, hard light.

Even Stein, the incarnation of wisdom, who knows 'the great trouble', -the failure of the dream - from his own long life, clings to it, and continues in the same breath, in which he offered his seemingly sound and only possible advice :

That was the way. To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream - and so - ewig - usque ad finem ...' (p.157)

This is Conrad's central obscurity which is never enlightened. The dream seems just as firmly rooted in the human heart as is evil in the world. It is incompatible with reality, and yet it is not possible to give it up, for, having known its sweetness, the world is too bitter to be borne. The dream is an integral part of man's nature - it belongs to him.

Conrad's central obscurity is shown in the following image:

The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn - or was it, perchance, at the coming of night? One had not the courage to decide; but it was a charming and deceptive light, throwing the impalpable poesy of its dimness over

pitfalls - over graves. His life had begun in sacrifice, in enthusiasm for generous ideas; he had travelled very far, on various ways, on strange paths, and whatever he followed it had been without faltering, and therefore without shame and without regret. In so far he was right. That was the way, no doubt. Yet for all that the great plain on which men wander amongst graves and pitfalls remained very desolated under the impalpable poesy of its crepuscular light, overshadowed in the centre, circled with a bright edge as if surrounded by an abyss full of flames. (p.157)

Stein is romantic himself, but the flames of hell seem to be waiting all round to wither the dream, - the world is not made for it. By clinging stubbornly to his dream Jim is 'in a fair way to make life intolerable to himself', his persistence is a 'gloom that seemed to envelop him from head to foot like the shadow of a passing cloud' (p.170). 'Living under his own little cloud', he is able, 'with all his unconscious subtlety, 'to draw consolation from the very source of sorrow' (p.172). Marlow sceptically remarks 'that in the old days people who went on like this were on the way of becoming hermits in a wilderness' (p.170), and yet he thinks that perhaps it is Jim who has the light of truth. The two old men stick their grey heads together to 'find a practical remedy for the great evil' :

'There is only one remedy! One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure!' The finger came down on the desk with a smart rap. The case became altogether hopeless. 'Yes,' said I, 'strictly speaking, the question is not how to get cured, but how to live'. (Stein, p.155)

The only cure for this cast of mind, -which makes people 'matter'-, seems to be death. Imagination, the creator of the dream, is 'the enemy of men, the father of all terrors'(p.9). It is the cause of their lofty dream and of their deep fall. It makes them excessively conscious of the terrible affliction of man and universe.

These are the exceptional qualities, which make Jim worthy of being the hero of a Conrad-story, and give him that significance which Decoud, the 'man of sensations', ascribes to Nostromo : 'Exceptional individualities always interest me, because they are true to the general formula expressing the moral state of humanity' (p.246). Thus the moral plight of Conrad's heroes is typical of modern man - and they illustrate it most clearly.

... he was a finished artist in that peculiar way, he was a gifted poor devil with the faculty of swift and forestalling vision. The sights it showed him had turned him into cold stone from the soles of his feet to the nape of his neck; but there was a hot dance of thoughts in his head, a dance of lame, blind, mute thoughts - a whirl of awful cripples.(p.71)

There is a distinctly Hamletian flavour about Jim. It is outwardly shown by the fact that among Jim's few belongings there is a Shakespeare edition. Both were made to look into themselves and shudder. Both were mortally wounded spirits. The one was frank with himself and accepted the truth and hesitated to act. The other one seems to have made frantic efforts to explain the truth away and carried on stubbornly as if the world had not been shaken out of joint. In his explanation of how he got involved with Jim Marlow distinctly refers to the Hamlet-theme and exhibits Conrad's central obsession :

.. the kind of thing that by devious, unexpected, truly diabolical ways causes me to run up against men with soft spots, with hard spots, with hidden plague spots, by Jove! and loosens their tongues at the sight of me for their infernal confidences; as though, forsooth, I had no confidences to make myself, as though - God help me! - I didn't have enough confidential information about myself to harrow my own soul till the end of my appointed time. And what I have done to be thus favoured I want to know. .. I have as much memofy as the average pilgrim in this valley, so you

see I am not particularly fit to be a receptacle  
of confessions. (p.26)

These young men with artist's minds, those who have  
the great dream and the resulting affliction, are Con-  
rad's favourites, those who

have been tested by those events of the sea that  
show in the light of the day the inner worth of a man,  
the edge of his temper and the fibre of his stuff;  
that reveal the quality of his resistance and the  
secret truth of his pretences, not only to others  
but also to himself. (p.8)

These young men make life worth while and hateful at the  
same time. The centre of his vision is the struggle  
of their great dream of light with the darkness of this  
world, and their downfall or complete disenchantment,  
-the extinction of light, and the invasion of darkness.  
A Marlow in some form or other runs up against them in  
all possible places, and, as it turns out, takes a hand  
in their fate, as in the case of Jim, and sees them gent-  
ly and with proper comment out of this worst of worlds.

Marlow explains that it was not just an extravagant  
whim which 'made him inquire into the state of a man's  
soul':

It's a weakness of mine ... My weakness consists of  
not having a discriminating eye for the incidental  
-for the externals ... I have met so many men - and  
in each case all I could see was merely the human being.

He appealed to all sides at once - to the side turned  
perpetually to the light of day, and to that side of  
us, which like the other hemisphere of the moon,  
exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only  
a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge.  
He swayed me. I own to it, I own up. The occasion  
was obscure, insignificant - what you will : a lost  
youngster, one in a million - but then he was one  
of us; an incident as completely devoid of importance  
as the flooding of an ant-heap, and yet the mystery  
of his attitude got hold of me as though he had been



an individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself ... (p.69)

Jim is 'craving after more glamour than he could carry' (p.111). When ~~his~~ first opportunity comes, he is too much absorbed in his dream to grasp it. The memory of this failure leaves a pain in his heart. For years his existence glides smoothly over quiet seas, as that of many people does till life's very end, 'when they gently sink into placid graves'. His stupid and simple goodness shines through his appearance,

this appearance appealing at sight to all my sympathies : this frank aspect, the artless smile, the youthful seriousness. He was of the right sort; he was one of us. (p.57)

His temptation comes to him with all the typical Conradese trappings :

Jim on the bridge was penetrated by the great certitude of unbounded safety and peace that could be read on the silent aspect of nature like the certitude of fostering love upon the placid tenderness of a mother's face. Below the roof of awnings, surrendered to the wisdom of white men and to their courage, trusting the power of their unbelief and the iron-shell of their fire-ship, the pilgrims of an exacting faith slept ... (p.13)

The pilgrims believe themselves safe from their own demons in the care of the white man, and Jim does not perceive the signs of the coming disaster either :

Above the mass of sleepers a faint and patient sigh at times floated, the exhalation of a troubled dream; and short metallic clangs bursting out suddenly in the depths of the ship, the harsh scrape of a shovel, the violent slam of a furnace-door, exploded brutally, as if the men handling the mysterious things below had their breasts full of fierce anger... Jim paced athwart .. and did not see the shadow of the coming event. (p.14)

Disaster catches him unawares while he is contemplating his dream :

His thoughts were 'full of valorous deeds : he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of his life, its secret truth, its hidden reality.

'The ash-buckets racketed, clanking up and down the stoke-hold ventilators, and this tin-pot clatter warned him the end of his watch was near. (p.15)

Then comes the sudden perfidious stab from the back. The skipper appears on deck :

.. The odious and fleshy figure, as though seen for the first time in a revealing dream, fixed itself in his memory for ever as the incarnation of everything vile and base that lurks in the world we love!...

.. it was the renegade's trick to appear pointedly unaware of your existence unless it suited his purpose to turn at you with a devouring glare ... (p.16)

The native pilgrims, on their way to 'eternal bliss', look up to the white men with that absolute trust with which the white man in his turn thinks of God. They are presented as mankind, huddled together in the darkness, Jim on the bridge has a god-like responsibility, -true to his dream-, when he is tempted by the terrors of the deep and by the devils of society :

'.. a maritime ghoul' seems to have been' on the prow to kill ships in the dark.

In those seas .. the incident was rare enough to resemble a special arrangement of a malevolent providence, which, unless it had for its object .. the bringing of worse than death upon Jim, appeared an utterly aimless piece of devilry. (p.117)

..there was a villainy of circumstances that cut these men off more completely from the rest of mankind, whose ideal of conduct had never undergone the trial of a fiendish and appalling joke ... planned by the tremendous disdain of the Dark Powers. (p.89)

.. the profound ignorance of hundreds of human beings, with their dreams, with their hopes, -was- arrested,

held by an invisible hand on the brink of annihilation. For that they were so makes no doubt to me .. this was the deadliest possible description of accident that could happen ... It was as if Omnipotence whose mercy they confessed had needed their humble testimony on earth for a while longer, and had looked down to make a sign, 'Thou shalt not!' to the ocean. (p.72)

In view of the immensity of trust lying on Jim's shoulders his crime has the importance of 'a breach of faith with the community of mankind' (p.115). The inquiry and the trial have 'all the cold vengefulness of a death sentence .. all the cruelty of a sentence of exile' (p.117)

Jim had 'saved his life, while all its glamour had gone with the ship in the night', and that is worse than death. (p.95) 'The truth can be wrung out of us only by some cruel, little, awful catastrophe' (p.238), and the truth is that Jim finds himself 'in one boat' (p.91) with some little, mean devils, -the 'poor devils of engineers' and the devilish skipper, who disappears 'like a witch on a broomstick' (p.35) and is never seen again. He is angry with them for his temptation, blaming them for his fall, and desires from Marlow later that he 'should not confound him with his partners in crime .. He was not one of them; he was altogether of another sort' (p.59)

He would be confident and depressed all in the same breath, as if some conviction of innate blamelessness had checked the truth writhing within him at every turn. (p.58)

Isn't it awful a man should be driven to do a thing like that - and be responsible? (p.88)

Jim is 'trying to save from the fire his idea of what his moral identity should be' (p.60):

..his mind positively flew round and round the serried circle of facts that had surged up all about him to cut him off from the rest of his kind; it was like a creature that, finding itself imprisoned within an enclosure of high stakes, dashes round and round, distracted in the night, trying to find

a weak spot, a crevice, a place to scale, some opening through which it may squeeze itself and escape. (p.23)

The truth is that he is a coward, incapable of restraining his fear. In the face of threats this fact turns out, but he is set on ignoring it:

I started forward, scraping my chair. He bounced off the table as if a mine had been exploded behind his back, and half turned before he alighted, crouching on his feet to show me a startled pair of eyes and a face white about the nostrils .. (p.88)

He has identified himself with an ideal of conduct which has no room for evil or fear. 'The infernal joke was being crammed devilishly down his throat, but - look you - he was not going to admit of any sort of swallowing motion' (p.81). All Jim's efforts to face the unfortunate and fatal fact in his life, and to shirk from it at the same time, struggling to reconcile it with his conception of himself, are overshadowed by this central obscurity. There is a 'subtle unsoundness about the man' (p.66). He does not know as yet what he really is, nor will he admit the evil in himself:

Upon the whole he was misleading. That's how I summed him up to myself after he left .. (p.56)

.. the idea obtrudes itself that he made so much of his disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters. He was not .. clear to me.. And there is a suspicion that he was not clear to himself either .. (p.130)

All his efforts to 'deal with himself under the new conditions were equally tinged by a high-minded absurdity of intention which made their futility profound and touching. To fling away your daily bread so as to get your hands free for a grapple with a ghost may be an act of prosaic heroism... He was indeed unfortunate, for all his recklessness could not carry him out from under the shadow. .. The truth is that it is impossible to lay the ghost of a fact... You can face it or shirk it .. Jim was not of the winking sort; but what I could never make up my mind about was whether his line of conduct amounted to shirking his ghost or to facing him out. (p.144)

Evil is there in us and cannot be denied. Although denying it consciously, Jim has mortally violated the spirit, - his good self -, in the eyes of others and of himself, and can never fully recover from the fatal wound. But although he denies it, he cannot shirk it. It is this spirit, the terrible hold of impossible conventions, and the dream of his exalted self, which he keeps struggling with:

He drew quick breaths at every few words and shot quick glances at my face, as though in his anguish he were watchful of the effect. (Marlow also is a patriarch.) He was not speaking to me, he was only speaking before me, in a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence - another possessor of his soul. These were issues beyond the competency of a court of inquiry: it was a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life...  
(pp.68-69)

The verdict of the court and of Marlow is 'guilty' (p.111). Jim and Marlow, both had hoped to find the 'shadow of an excuse' in the proceedings of the court, a 'hint of saving grace', a 'single uplifting touch'. This however is a vain hope, unless it lies, as Marlow seems to hint, in Jim's courage in facing the trial out to the end, although it is 'hell' (p.51) for him. In his vain attempts at justification, he is at war with himself. He tries to bully Marlow into admission of the rotten spot in himself:

These were issues beyond the competency of a court of enquiry: it was a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life, and did not want a judge. He wanted an ally, a helper, an accomplice. I felt the risk I ran of being circumvented, blinded, decoyed, into taking a definite part in a dispute impossible of decision.  
(p. 69)

..it behoved me to make no sign lest by a gesture or a word I should be drawn into a fatal admission about myself.  
(p.79)



..he confessed himself before me as though I had the power to bind and loose? He burrowed deep, deep, in the hope of my absolution, which would have been of no good to him. This was one of those cases which no solemn deception can palliate, which no man can help; where his very Maker seems to abandon a sinner to his own devices. (p.71)

All his struggling is a frantic effort to reconcile himself to the terrible discovery of evil, which has come to him through a tremendous shock. And yet Jim clings to his dream, stubbornly refusing to give it up.

Ah, he was an imaginative beggar!... I could see in his glance darted into the night all his inner being carried on, projected headlong into the fanciful realm of recklessly heroic aspirations. He had no leisure to regret what he had lost, he was so wholly and naturally concerned with what he had failed to obtain. ..his eyes sparkled in the light of the candle burning between us; he positively smiled! ..He had penetrated to the very heart...It was an ecstatic smile...

I whisked him back by saying, 'If you had stuck to the ship, you mean!'

He turned upon me, his eyes suddenly amazed and full of pain, with a bewildered, startled, suffering face, as though he had tumbled down from a star. ..He shuddered profoundly, as if a cold finger-tip had touched his heart. (p.61)

'I wished I could die,' he cried. 'There was no going back. It was as if I had jumped into a well - into an everlasting deep hole...' (p.82)

Nothing could be more true: he had indeed jumped into an everlasting deep hole. He had tumbled from a height he could never scale again. (p.83)

This is the red line, the central ambiguity which runs through the whole book: the terrible reality of evil in conflict with the great dream of light. Marlow sits in dark night in his room, on the night after Jim's trial, and broods over the steps he should take to help him: Again there is the typical struggle in the expectant stillness of the Universe - a soul struggling against surrender after

its downfall - rallying its courage to face the world anew:

He was fighting, he was fighting - mostly for his breath, as it seemed. The massive shadows, cast all one way from the straight flame of the candle, seemed possessed of gloomy consciousness; the immobility of the furniture had to my attentive eye an air of attention. Suddenly...I heard a low sound, the first sound that since we had been shut up together, had come to my ears in the dim stillness of the room...Those who have kept vigil by a sick-bed have heard such faint sounds wrung from a racked body, from a weary soul.  
(pp.126-127)

...he fought and gasped, struggling for his breath in that terribly stealthy way, in my room;...he rushed out on the veranda as if to fling himself over - and didn't; ... he remained outside. (p.130)

...through the open door the outer edge of light from my candle fell on his back faintly; beyond all was black; he stood on the brink of a vast obscurity, like a lonely figure by the shore of a sombre and hopeless ocean.  
(p.127)

Jim is facing the vast universe of evil, which seems the only reality. And yet the doubt remains always there, whether the dream is not a curse, but a blessing:

...suddenly a searching and violent glare fell on the blind face of the night. The sustained and dazzling flickers seemed to last for an unconceivable time. The growl of the thunder increased steadily while I looked at him, distinct and black, planted solidly upon the shores of a sea of light. At the moment of greatest brilliance the darkness leaped back with a culminating crash, and he vanished before my dazzled eyes as utterly as though he had been blown to atoms. (p.131)

By a shock like that, man is cast out of his paradise. He is too light for this world, too dark for another, at home in none.

Jim has soon dragged himself up from the depth of despair, and says

'If this business couldn't knock me over, then there's

no fear of there not being enough time to - climb out, and ...' He looked upwards. (p. 132)

He decides to face it all out, to live it down and make a new start to realize his dream:

But I knew the truth, and I would live it down - alone with myself. I wasn't going to give in to such a beastly unfair thing.

No! The proper thing was to face it out - alone for myself - wait for another chance - find out... (p.97)

.. he was eager to go through the ceremony of execution;.. There was something fine in the wildness of his unexpressed, hardly formulated hope. 'Clear out! Couldn't think of it!' he said, with a shake of his head. (p.112)

He thinks that something will be 'paid off' (p.131) when he has gone through the trial.

'But I've got to get over this thing, and I mustn't shirk any of it or... I won't shirk any of it'... His unconscious face reflected the passing expressions of scorn, of despair, of resolution... He said incisively.. looking at me without a wink, 'I may have jumped, but I don't run away.'

'Perhaps so,' he said at last; 'I am not good enough; I can't afford it. I am bound to fight this thing down - I am fighting it now.' (p.113)

I became positive in my mind that the inquiry was a severe punishment to that Jim, and that his facing it - practically of his own free will - was a redeeming feature in his abominable case. (p.51)

In the middle of a deluge-like rainfall Marlow has decided to help Jim - to give him another chance -. He cannot let him go to the dogs, although he had a disturbing sense of being no help but rather an obstacle to some mysterious, inexplicable, impalpable striving of his wounded spirit'. (p.134)

I had forced into his hands the means to carry on decently the serious business of life, to get food,

drink, and shelter of the customary kind while his wounded spirit, like a bird with a broken wing, might hop and flutter into some hole to die quietly of inaction there. This is what I had thrust upon him: a definitely small thing; and - behold! - by the manner of its reception it loomed in the dim light of the candle like a big, indistinct, perhaps a dangerous shadow. And Jim continues: 'I always thought that if a fellow could begin with a clean slate .. And now you .. in a measure yes.. clean slate.'

(p.136)

I smiled to think that, after all, it was yet he, of us two, who had the light. And I felt sad. A clean slate, did he say? As if the initial word of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock.

Jim stubbornly refuses to give up hope and illusion, hoping for forgetfulness, 'for the thing to be buried.'  
(Jim p.139) In his craving to live it down he submits himself to tasks unworthy of his former standing:

I kept my eye on his shabby plodding with a sort of notion that it was a punishment for the heroics of his fancy - an expiation for his craving after more glamour than he could carry. He had loved too well to imagine himself a glorious racehorse, and now he was condemned to toil without honour like a costermonger's donkey. He did it very well. He shut himself in, put his head down, said never a word. Very well; very well indeed - except for certain fantastic and violent outbreaks, on the deplorable occasions when the Patna case cropped up..

(pp.110-111)

..it was almost pathetic to see him go about in sunshine hugging his secret, which was known to the very up-country logs in the river...

(p.144)

On his flight from shame Jim does well everywhere. He earns the sympathy and trust of men, but his shame follows him into the remotest corners of the Pacific. He 'retreats in good order towards the rising sun', ~~being~~ being mockingly told by Egström that 'the earth wouldn't be big enough to hold his caper' if he went on like that.



He gets his final 'chance' through Marlow with the help of Stein. He is taken away from the 'rest of the universe' - out of reality - and sent into the heart of the wilderness - Patusan, an outpost of Stein's trading company -. In that place, which 'had been used' before 'as a grave for some sin, transgression, or misfortune' (p.161), he 'had a clean slate':

He left his earthly failings behind him and that sort of reputation he had, and there was a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon. (p.160)

Once before 'light had been carried into' it 'for the sake of better morality and - well - the greater profit, too.'

Like many of his forerunners Jim goes there as a bearer of light and a pioneer of progress, but he is truly 'disinterested', apart from his craving to repair his damaged honour.

Against great odds and real dangers Jim creates a little world according to his dream. He is 'loved, trusted, admired, with a legend of strength and prowess forming round his name as though he had been the stuff of a hero'. (p.129) He roots out all injustice and violence single-handed and rules in absolute power. The poor Malays, whom he freed from the oppression of the Arabs, call him 'Tuan'- Lord Jim. He seems to 'hurl defiance at the universe', (p.173) and yet he gets on. All his aims are summed up in one simple phrase: that 'no man should be prevented from getting his food and his children's food decently' (p.183):

In the midst of these dark-faced men, his stalwart figure in white apparel, the gleaming clusters of fair hair, seemed to catch all the sunshine that trickled through the cracks in the closed shutters of that dim



hall, with its walls of mats and a roof of thatch. He appeared like a creature not only of another kind but of another essence. Had they not seen him come up in a canoe they might have thought he had descended upon them from the clouds.

(p.168)

No doubt it was immense; the seal of success upon his words, the conquered ground for the soles of his feet, the blind trust of men, the belief in himself snatched from the fire, the solitude of his achievement.

(p.199)

He has fallen in love with the daughter of an evil Portuguese, and calls her 'jewel'. She has saved him from certain death at the very beginning, watching over him by day and night. Here is Marlow with Jim in his little world:

And there I was with him, high in the sunshine on the top of that historic hill of his. He dominated the forest, the secular gloom, the old mankind. He was like a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom. I don't know why he should always have appeared to me symbolic. Perhaps this is the real cause of my interest in his fate.

(p.194)

Jim is seen as a member of the white races which have 'risen from the gloom,' defeated the darkness and banished the demons. He represents all the virtues which have been created in western civilisation, and, being 'disinterested', he is immune to the call of the wilderness. He had however his tussle with the demons who have been allowed to raise their head through the 'material interests'. Marlow sees him and his little world through the knowledge of this fact:

I don't know whether it was exactly fair to him to remember the incident which had given a new direction to his life, but at that very moment I remembered distinctly. It was like a shadow in the light.

(p.194)

The futility of Jim's achievement, in spite of all its splendour, becomes most obvious through the aspect of the hill, - image of himself -, which dominates the country in the light of the moon - the hill on which Jim had finally beaten his enemies. The moonlight in Conrad is always an illusory reflection of the reality of the sunlight, bearing at its back the darkness:

..there can be seen rising above the level of the forests the summits of two steep hills, very close together, and separated by what looks like a deep fissure, the cleavage of some mighty stroke... the appearance is of one irregularly conical hill split in two, and with the two halves leaning slightly apart. The moon rose exactly behind these hills, throwing the two masses into intensely black relief, gliding upwards between the sides of the chasm, till it floated away above the summits, as if escaping from a yawning grave in gentle triumph.

(p.161)

There still is the fact which was there when he set out for Patusan:

One of his footfalls somehow sounded louder than the other - the fault of his boots probably - and gave a curious impression of an invisible halt in his gait.

(p.176)

When Marlow leaves him, there is a 'deadly scheming going on all around him, on all sides, in the dark.' Jim's path is already beset by Cornelius, the evil father of his jewel:

He was perpetually slinking away; whenever seen he was moving off deviously, his face over his shoulder with either a mistrustful snarl or a woebegone, piteous, mute aspect.

There is Jim talking to Marlow on the last day of his visit to him, when the darkness is already forecasting its return into the spot of light created by Jim.

If you ask them (the Malays) who is brave, who is true - who is just - who is it they would trust with

their lives? - they would say, Tuan Jim. And yet they can never know the real, real truth...' I don't know why, listening to him, I should have noted so distinctly the gradual darkening of the river, of the air; the irresistible slow work of the night settling silently on all the visible forms, effacing the outlines, burying the shapes deeper and deeper, like a steady fall of impalpable black dust. (pp.223-224)

Jim's guardian angel, jewel, wants to protect him from the something which haunts him and has driven him out of the world of white men. - She wants to drag his secret out of Marlow. Jim has owned it up to her, but she does not believe him:

'He says he had been afraid. How can I believe this? You all remember something... What is this thing? Is it alive? - is it dead? I hate it. It is cruel. Has it got a face and a voice - this calamity? Will he see it - will he hear it? In his sleep perhaps when he cannot see me -..Will it be a sign - a call?' (p.231)

She wants to know by all means why the world does not want Jim back.

'Because he is not good enough,' I said, brutally. During the moment's pause I noticed the fire on the other shore blaze up, dilating the circle of its glow like an amazed stare, and contract suddenly to a red pin-point. ..!Nobody, nobody is good enough', I began with the greatest earnestness. I could hear the sobbing labour of her breath frightfully quickened. I hung my head. What was the use... (p.234)

What I had to tell her was that in the whole world there was no one who ever would need his heart, his mind, his hand. It was a common fate, and yet it seemed an awful thing to say of any man.

She knew him to be strong, true, wise, brave. He was all that. Certainly. He was more. He was great - invincible - and the world did not want him, it had forgotten him, it would not even know him. (p. 233)

Man is 'great', man is 'invincible', he is 'true' and 'brave' and yet the world does not want him', and 'does not

even know him'; He is not 'needed' in the world, and that 'is a common fate, though awful to say'. Man is 'not good enough for the world' and yet here is Jim, declaring his faith in his dream, despite his downfall, when Marlow is on the point of leaving him to his fate:

'I shall be faithful,' he said, quietly. 'I shall be faithful,' he repeated, without looking at me, but for the first time letting his eyes wander upon the waters, whose blueness had changed to a gloomy purple under the fires of sunset. (pp.245-246)

All this forecasts Jim's fate - but somehow he seems reconciled to his fate, and to the spirit of the sea:

By that time the sun had set. The twilight lay over the east, and the coast, turned black, extended infinitely its sombre wall that seemed the very stronghold of the night; the western horizon was one great blaze of gold and crimson in which a big detached cloud floated dark and still, casting a slaty shadow on the water beneath, and I saw Jim on the beach watching the schooner fall off and gather headway. (p.247)

Here is the west full of light, but with its typical cloud which casts its shadow over the sea,- of which Jim carries his share, - opposed to the darkness of the wilderness in the east: - civilisation and savagery.-

He was white from head to foot, and remained persistently visible with the stronghold of the night at his back, the sea at his feet, the opportunity by his side - still veiled. ..For me that white figure in the stillness of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart of a vast enigma. The twilight was ebbing fast from the sky above his head, the strip of sand had sunk already under his feet, he himself appeared no bigger than a child- then only a speck, a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world ... And, suddenly, I lost him...' (p.247)

At this point in the story we already know that Jim's fate is sealed. The man Brown comes, leader of a gang of outcasts of the worst kind, - himself a veteran of the sea, one



of the lowest grade of adaptation to the 'world-pain', a 'blind accomplice of the Dark Powers'-. (p.260) He threatens Jim's little world, who keeps the power to destroy him utterly in the hollow of his hand. He is however unable to see the depths of corruption and evil cunning in his opponent. Advised by Cornelius, who is scorned even by this brute, he appeals to the dark spot in Jim's past, succeeding in making him soft and lenient. He is allowed to escape with his gang, - allegory for all different sorts of evil like Jones' followers in Victory -. There is a terrible massacre in the dark of the night and Dain Waris, Jim's 'Jonathan', son of his trusting old friend Doramin, is killed. This renewed betrayal, - however different the circumstance -, is just as bad as his first. In his God-like power Jim has betrayed the absolute trust of his little mankind, by allowing evil to survive. In a solemn, almost ritual scene, melodramatic like Lena's end, he offers himself as a sacrifice for his guilt to Dain's father. Again he refuses to run away:

'He hath taken it upon his own head,' a voice said aloud. He heard this and turned to the crowd. 'Yes. Upon my head.' ..The crowd rushed tumultuously forward after the shot. They say that the white man sent right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance. Then with his hand over his lips he fell forward, dead.

And that's the end. He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic.

Jewel, who will not forgive Jim for not escaping his punishment accuses him of being false. Stein's, - the oracle's -, reply is: 'No! no! Not false! True! true! true!' (p.258)

Stein's final judgement must be seen from his contradictory attitude in the face of human existence. Jim evidently mattered in virtue of his dream, and at the ~~the~~ same time Marlow sheds a scalding sarcasm on it. He confesses himself



to it and ascribes his disenchantment to its failure, hoping all the time to see it saved by Jim:

I was aggrieved against him, as though he had cheated me - me!- of a splendid opportunity to keep up the illusion of my beginnings, as though he had robbed our common life of the last spark of its glamour.

It is the same ambivalent attitude as there is in Stein. On the one hand man 'should immerse in the destructive element', -recognise the overwhelming reality of evil-and at the same time he should cling to the dream 'usque ad finem'. But only death can cure us from it, and therefore it must be a reality in us. It is bound to perish, but it is there: undeniably.

Marlow is at a loss as to the true essence of life, and expects an answer through Jim's fate, declaring himself to be selfish in this respect in the face of the young man's sufferings:

I have a distinct notion that I wished to find something. Perhaps, unconsciously, I hoped I would find that something, some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse. I see well enough now that I hoped for the impossible - for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation. (p.37)

Was it for my own sake that I wished to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow whom I had never seen before, but whose appearance alone added a touch of personal concern to the thoughts suggested by the knowledge of his weakness - made it a thing of mystery and terror - like a hint of a destructive fate ready for us all whose youth - in its day - had resembled his youth....

He would be confident and depressed all in the same breath as if some conviction of innate blamelessness had checked the truth writhing within him at every turn. (p.58)

..the mystery of his attitude got hold of me as though he had been an individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself. (p.69)

Jim is a projection of Conrad's bewilderment in the face of existence: 'I was made to look at the convention that lurks in all truth and on the essential sincerity of falsehood.'(p.69) This ambivalence of evaluation runs through the whole book - it is not only Jim's struggle to gain clarity as to himself and the world, but also that of Marlow and, through him, Conrad. There are no longer simply two ways of doing things: right and wrong, but

It was not a lie - but it wasn't true all the same. It was something .. one knows a downright lie. There was not the thickness of a sheet of paper between the right and wrong of this affair. He advanced his argument as though life had been a network of paths separated by chasms'.

This ambivalence is at the core of all of C's books.

As proved by his admission to Jewel, Jim has discovered the cause of his weakness and turns his back on society, ...' his rush had really carried him out of that mist in which he loomed'... (p.165). He faces his guilt and has it out with himself, clinging to his dream. Marlow's offer to keep him alive becomes a tremendous chance in his destiny. He is completely 'disinterested' materially and goes out gladly to a place of darkness, untouched by 'the mighty and devouring stream of civilization' and brings light into it - himself being the very source of its light. He proves that

..the Dark Powers, whose real terrors, always on the verge of triumph, are perpetually foiled by the steadfastness of men. (p.89) ..had survived the assault of the dark powers .., ..snatched the belief in himself from the fire (p.181) ..had at last mastered his fate. (p.199) To Jim's success there were no externals.. (p.238)

All that seemed but monstrous bragging before (p.70)  
Jim has made to come true: (p.182)

Negation and affirmation of the spirit are distinctly

opposed to each other in the book. Conrad comes to the conclusion that 'the human heart is vast enough to contain all the world. (p.237) It is valiant enough to bear the burden'. But at the same time he asks: 'But where is the courage to cast it off?'

The last and 'supreme' test for Jim is supposed to bring the revelation. Although Marlow emphatically confirms that 'he is not good enough for 'the world out there' the implication is quite plain that Jim is too good. When the 'emissaries' come from 'out there', where he did not think himself good enough to live, he has not 'enough devil in him to make an end of them'. They are a menace, a shock, a danger to his work', but he assesses them from the substance of his own heart and experience. He is overcome, plainly not for lack of courage, but for lack of evil in his heart. He is 'a spirit utterly out of their reach' (p.284), and therefore is a prey for them. For that reason his small community, although inoffensive, is betrayed by the creatures of civilization. Jim offers his own life as a sacrifice for the guilt of the creatures from 'out there'.

As Stein states quite emphatically, he is 'true, true, true' to his real nature. But as such, we are made to see, he is 'too good' for this world of evil, - although the likes of him make it worth while. He has followed his dream, and was true, and has shown a hint for the redemption and salvation of this waste of 'material interests'. He has dispelled its 'cloud' and penetrated to the 'true light'.

This explains why Jim should seem to 'frame a message to the impeccable world'. But he never did, because Conrad did not want to take stand. The whole ambiguity is unrolled again in a letter of Marlow, discussing Jim's fate:

Marlow's letter to a friend: You said also - I call to mind - that 'giving your life up to them! (them meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow or black in colour) 'was like selling your soul to a brute.' You contended that 'that kind of thing' was only endurable and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially our own, in whose names are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress. 'We want its strength at our back,' you had said. 'We want a belief in its necessity and its justice, to make a worthy and conscious sacrifice of our lives. Without it the sacrifice is only forgetfulness, the way of offering is not better than the way to perdition'. In other words, you maintained that we must fight in the ranks or our lives don't count. Possibly! You ought to know - be it said without malice - you who have rushed into one or two places single-handed and came out cleverly, without singeing your wings. The point, however, is that of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself, and the question is whether at the last he had not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress.

I affirm nothing. Perhaps you may pronounce - after you've read. There is much truth - after all - in the common expression 'under a cloud'!

I have no hesitation in imparting to you all I know of the last episode that, as he used to say, had 'come to him'. One wonders whether this was perhaps that supreme opportunity, that last and satisfying test for which I had always suspected him to be waiting, before he could frame a message to the impeccable world.

There shall be no message, unless such as each of us can interpret for himself from the language of facts, that are so often more enigmatic than the craftiest arrangements of words. (Jim, pp. 249-250)

The question remains open whether Jim wanted to declare what his true destiny was, in complete certainty as to having lived up to it, - which the description of his death seems to confirm -, or 'was this only the aimless startled cry of a solitary man confronted by his fate?' (p.249)

He was overwhelmed by the inexplicable; he was overwhelmed by his own personality - the gift of that destiny which he had done his best to master...



Jim's fate is obviously seen as the 'grapple of a soul' to realise its true destiny,<sup>seen</sup> in relation to the whole<sup>of</sup> mankind.

She had said he had been driven away from her by a dream,- and there was no answer one could make her - there seemed to be no forgiveness for such a transgression. And yet is not mankind itself, pushing on its blind way, driven by a dream of its greatness and its power upon the dark paths of excessive cruelty and of excessive devotion? And what is the pursuit of truth, after all? (p.257)

..all our illusions, .. I suspect only to be visions of remote unattainable truth, seen dimly. (p.237)

Are not our lives too short for that full utterance which through all our stammerings is of course our only and abiding intention? I have given up expecting those last words, whose ring, if they could be pronounced, would shake both heaven and earth. (p.165)

Jim had not lived according to the false tenets of society but true to the essence of his heart - as it was given to him by his creator - affirming the 'spirit'. The realization of evil in himself had brought out his 'spirit' in full strength.

In spite of not seeming to take a stand, it is plain that Conrad does take one. He shrinks from calling this good or bad, but by painting in black and white, or by the denominations he gives to the creatures of the dark powers,<sup>they</sup> are distinctly branded as evil. His central obscurity, as pointed out here, is his conscious negation of the spirit in the face of overwhelming evil, whereas spontaneously there is a tremendous zest for life in the form of 'spirits' who are pitched against the forces of despair, even when fighting at odds. It is the expression of the reverse of his truth - that life is not worth the candle-. He condemns rules of conduct but has no other ones to offer instead. He is desperately seeking, but there is always his sympathy for the dream, his clinging to it, and his profound pity for its



victims, his hate and revolt against the powers which destroy it, and the stubborn clinging to a knowledge of a better world, - in himself and in the victims-.

Ultimately, he does not refute the belief in God - but His face is hidden from us-. He confesses himself unable to see through His purposes, and expresses his revolt at this fact.

The French officer, one of the noblest and most integral figures in Conrad's work, pricks the bubble of Jim's mystery and states the fatal weakness of man which makes him fall prey to evil. He explains why 'nobody is good enough'. He seemed to bear the promise of a great destiny when young and is:

left hopelessly behind by time with a few poor gifts; the iron grey hair, the heavy fatigue of the tanned face, two scars, a pair of tarnished shoulder-straps; one of those steady, reliable men who are the raw material of great reputations, one of those uncoun-  
ted lives that are buried without drums and trumpets under the foundations of monumental successes,  
(Jim, p.105)

Incidentally he has a stiff hand like Conrad himself.  
He is talking to Marlow:

'The fear, the fear - look you - it is always there'.  
He touched his breast near a brass button on the very spot where Jim had given a thump to his own when protesting that there was nothing the matter with his heart.  
(Jim, p.107)

Brave! This is always to be seen .. Brave-you conceive - in the service - one has got to be - the trade demands it ...  
(p.107)

Each of them - I say each of them, if he were an honest man - bien entendu - would confess that there is a point for the best of us - there is somewhere a point when you let go everything.

Marlow has made it sufficiently clear, that for him as well as for everybody else there had been such points - only they had not been caught in them as unfortunately as Jim.

And you have got to live with that truth - do you see? Given a certain combination of circumstances, fear is sure to come .. And even for those who do not believe this truth there is fear all the same - the fear of themselves. Absolutely so. Trust me.. At my age one knows what one is talking about. (p.107)

The French officer, who has done his 'possible', stayed on the Patna for 30 hours, under most dangerous conditions. And yet he has made and had 'his proofs'. He continues:

Man is born a coward. It is a difficulty - parbleu! It would be too easy otherwise. But habit - habit - necessity - do you see? - the eye of others- voilà. One puts up with it. And then the example of others who are no better than yourself, and yet make good countenance. (Jim,p.108)

Marlow is glad to think that he takes a lenient view - the young man not having any of those 'inducements at the moment'. He adds that the young man took a hopeful view.

He contended that one may get on knowing very well that one's courage does not come of itself. There's nothing much in that to get upset about. One truth more or less ought not to make life impossible .. But the honour . the honour, monsieur! .. the honour .. that is real - that is! And what life may be worth when .. when the honour is gone - a ça! Par exemple - I can offer no opinion. I can offer no opinion - because - monsieur - I know nothing of it. (Jim pp.108-109)

Marlow said 'with a disconcerted smile, but couldn't it reduce itself to not being found out'. This would mean to put guilt on the same level as disgrace, which is sin found out. 'This, monsieur, is too fine for me - much above me - I don't think about it', is the officer's reply. Marlow is left with his doubt. Is it honour, as the respect in the eyes of fellowmen, or is it that feeling of harmony with an inner voice?

The reader of Conrad knows in what extraordinary way the inner life of a character can be revealed by a single glance. In an excellent concentration of language and meaning Conrad lays bare the core of the problem before us and with it the soul of the French officer. This is one of those passages which make him a poet in prose:

He drew up his heavy eyelids. Drew up - I say - no other expression can describe the steady deliberation of the act, - and at last was disclosed completely to me.

I was confronted by two narrow grey circlets like two steel rings around the profound blackness of the pupils. The sharp glance, coming from that massive body, gave a notion of extreme efficiency, like a razor-edge on a battle-axe. (p.108)

Here we have the whole being, the dark core, containing the phantoms, horrors, demons, and fear, and the grey steel rings, which are their control, restraint and bounds. Jim's eyes are blue - the colour of the dream -. He did not have the time to steel his heart, he had neither the example nor knowledge nor habit of keeping control. He was hopelessly overtaken when overcome by the horrors. His hold on his devil - or his fear - is much weaker. His 'possible' lies much lower than that of this steeled and efficient man. The 'point' was overstretched. It is this which makes him so pitiful - his youth and innocence-.

We have called the French officer one of the most integral characters because all of them are seen and evaluated according to the way in which they refuse to see the 'world-pain', or their 'cloud', or their 'devil', and according to the way in which they see it and live it down. He is outstanding for his sincerity with himself. There are Jim and Captain Brown, 'standing on the opposite poles of that conception which includes all mankind! (p.250) Jim is spotlessly white, immaculate, a 'spirit utterly out

of the reach' (p.284) of captain Brown, appearing to him like 'one of those people that should have wings so as to go about without touching the dirty earth', (p.282) 'seeming to belong to things he had in the very shaping of his life contemned and flouted'. (p.280) Captain Brown on the other hand, 'with a sunken, sun-blackened face' (p.280), has fully complied with the dark powers, and overcomes Jim, who 'hadn't devil enough in him to make an end' of Brown. (p.253) Brown is a 'menace, a shock, a danger' to the little world created in Jim's spirit. (p.284)

Brown had 'a scorn for mankind at large and for his victims in particular'. (p.259) We meet him at the moment of his death when

the corpse of his mad self-love uprose from rags and destitution as from the dark horrors of the tomb'. 'Standing at the gate of the other world in the guise of a beggar he had slapped this world's face, he had spat on it, he had thrown upon it an immensity of scorn and revolt at the bottom of his misdeeds. He had overcome them all .. (p.282)

Brown tells Jim that 'we are equal before death', and yet he squirms when it comes for him. Death is the same for all, and yet the highest rule for our conduct is to see that we can 'go out decently'.

The moral value of the whole range of Conrad's characters, - for him the absolute value-, is determined by the way in which they adapt their manner of conduct to the world-wide affliction, - every man according to his own inner substance, his - 'Secret of Hearts' -. Some make use of evil, furthering it instead of offering resistance, and they are presented as devils. Others, like Chester and Falk, play their game according to the cruel rules, asserting their instincts at the cost of humanity, ~~every man according to his inner substance~~. There are the ranks of those who

resist it but have fallen and have but partly recovered from their failure. Most of them have learnt to see the 'world pain' in some way or other, and have accepted it sadly, realising the fact that human nature is fatally stricken. Most of them are somehow stricken by the great struggle. Old, maimed men, -they have their burden, all have their guilt -, and all have had their tussle. They are masters of the great negation. The young, full of illusions and hope, and full of ignorance of the 'world-pain', are the objects of their pity and of their vain efforts to help. Conrad does not preach the necessity of illusions to make life bearable. They are the folly of the big mass. The elect, - those nearest to perfection and worthy of the assault of the dark powers, discard illusions as futile mists and accept the dark truth without shrinking. Defeated, disillusioned, - 'disenchanted' - and 'immersed in the destructive element' which carries them, <sup>they</sup> have drawn experience from their scars. The old veteran, bearing his scars and his guilt stoically, is the sort of character who comes nearest to perfection in Conrad - the only perfection possible in his sense-. There is no real 'Leitbild', such as has always existed in fiction, there is no place for great men in Conrad's world - it is too vast and hostile for them-. Either they are not able to live up to their chances, or their chances do not equal their worth.



If we try to survey the whole range of characters in Conrad's fiction, we can say that he is only concerned with those who have been submitted to the 'supreme test', which:

shows in the light of the day the inner worth of a man, the edge of his temper -- the fibre of his stuff. the quality of his resistance .. the secret truth of his pretences. (Jim, p.8)

This supreme test turns out the quality of their 'Secret of Hearts', and accordingly we can divide them into five groups, according to our outline of the forces of the soul.

1) These are the Patriarchs, and the men of simple faith, invulnerable and immune to temptation, devoted to an ideal, single-minded, simple, ignorant of evil in the middle of its onslaught. They are:

of that good stupid kind we like to feel marching right and left of us in life.. not disturbed by the vagaries of intelligence and the perversions of - of nerves, let us say. (p.33)

They are the men on whom the stability and continuance of life is firmly founded:

men and women, by no means clever or amusing, but whose very existence is based upon honest faith, and upon the instinct of courage. I don't mean military courage, or civil courage, or any special courage. I mean just that inborn ability to look temptations straight in the face - a readiness unintellectual enough, goodness knows, but without pose - a power of resistance, don't you see, ungracious if you like, but priceless - an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors, before the might of nature, and the seductive corruption of men - backed by a faith invulnerable to the strength of facts, to the contagion of example, to the solicitation of ideas. Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the back-door of your mind, each taking a little of your substance, each carrying away some crumb of that belief in a few simple notions you

must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy. (Jim,p.32)

They are immune because they lack the intelligence and imagination, which would make them perceive the essence of the facts to the surface of which they are devoted.

2) Opposed to them, like fire to water, are those without restraint and checks: devils like Brown or Jones, following their own selfishness ruthlessly; they are merely destructive - like the Professor with his destructive bomb in opposition to the 'apostle' Michaelis, with his ideas of universal brotherhood.

3) Between these two groups, claimed and protected by the one, and hated and destroyed by the other, stand Conrad's heroes. They have the simple faith of the ones, and the intelligence and imagination of the others. They are brought up on the sea, 'one of us', and at the same time are at variance with its spirit. They have a share of two elements which are incompatible and are victims of the irreconcilable struggle between them. In Conrad's fiction we are made to see the climax which decides it, and we are supposed to realise the true nature of existence through the fatal shock which its victims receive.

4) There is another group, those who have also realised the terrible presence of evil, but neither affirm it nor struggle against it, trying to keep aloof and watch the spectacle, although pitying the victims and loathing the devils. With both groups they share a profound revolt against the terrible injustice of things. The victims try to set things right, the devils express their revolt through sheer destructive will, and those who keep aloof consider all as futile, sharing the scorn of the devils for the whole show. Their scorn only stops before the suffering of the victims,

but the men of simple faith also fall under it, because of their lucid ignorance of the horrors of life. With the rest of the universe, they despise themselves to a certain extent. Just as Conrad paints the first group white, the second in black and white, and the third black, so he qualifies the 'men of sensation' in the fate of Martin Decoud, and reveals the impotence of the irony in which they have taken refuge, when it is opposed to the might of the world:

..he was in danger to remain a sort of non-descript dilettante all his life. He had pushed the point of universal raillery to a point where it blinded him to the genuine impulses of his own nature.

(Nostromo, p.153)

..he died from solitude ..whom only the simplest of us are fit to withstand .. he had died from solitude and want of faith in himself and others.

(p.496)

..he was not fit to grapple with himself single-handed. Solitude from mere outward conditions of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affections of irony and scepticism have no place..

(p.497)

..he erected passions into duties, both his intelligence and his passion were swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith.. He beheld the universe as a succession of incomprehensible images..

(p.498)

.. a victim of the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity.. swallowed up in the immense indifference of things..

(p.501)

5) There is the last group, the likes of Marlow, the pitying guardians of the victims, men of the sea but wanderers too, with a good share of the irony which characterizes the cynics like Decoud and Dr. Monygam. They are the incarnations of the central ambiguity which runs through Conrad's work and is never solved: conscious reflective negation and active spontaneous affirmation. They admire the men of faith, but

but they see the futility of their faith. They have been victims in their time, they had their 'proofs', and have survived despair. They have realised the overwhelming reality of evil, which no man can withstand in the long run, - which makes life intolerable-, and they seek refuge in the devotion to their task:

What saves us is efficiency - the devotion to efficiency.  
(H.o.D., p.57)

Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates. In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independant existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part.  
(Nostromo, p.66)

When you have to attend.. to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality- the reality, I tell you - fades. The inner truth is hidden - luckily, luckily.  
(H.o.D. p.105)

Marlow calls his particular work in 'H.o.D.' a 'tight-rope-performance', but it helps to 'forget the heartache, which makes up the rest of the price'. It is 'like a blind-folded man set to drive a van over a bad road'.  
(p.106)

Conrad discards all creeds and principles. The strong do not need their help to overcome despair - they have to do without the help of God or mankind, but - they have a sufficient hold in themselves. They have an inborn strength, the 'cruel' strength of life', which makes them resist despite the fact that they are hopelessly overmatched. They survive failure and downfall, struggling on with their wounds and scars, and their littleness makes their struggle the more admirable. From this angle we must see some of Conrad's statements as to the task of man:

The fact is, however, that one becomes useful only on realizing the utter insignificance of the individual in the scheme of the universe. When one well understands that



in oneself one is nothing and that a man is worth neither more nor less than the work he accomplishes with honesty of purpose and means, and within the strict limits of his duty towards society, only then is one the master of his conscience with the right to call himself a man. Otherwise, were he more attractive than Prince Charming, richer than Midas, wiser than Doctor Faust himself, the two-legged featherless creature is only a despicable thing sunk in the mud of all the passions.

This statement comes as close to a creed as can be found in Conrad's fiction, but it also shows that he resigned himself to leaving the 'mysteriousness' of existence alone - his revolt and bewilderment is there to the last moment.

We have chosen Lord Jim for this subject because Conrad was very outspoken about it in that book. Jim is a man in the 'forefront of his kind', a fine being, though simple and not perceiving depths, - running up against an incomprehensible world, stubbornly sticking through his failure, and doomed to perish. He is typical of those who matter for Conrad: men with the dream and much imagination, and therefore excessively endangered, realising evil excessively through the clash of their ideal with reality, in which they receive a fatal wound. It is those who are endangered who matter for Conrad. Jim proves that man is 'great, invincible, true, brave', and yet 'the world does not know him' and does not 'want him'. There is another side to his nature, which makes him constantly succumb. There is also the fear before the might of the world, and man is also a coward. With all his valour and his wisdom and his greatness man is 'not good enough, nobody is good enough'. He is no more significant than a grain of sand on the shore of the vast ocean, - forgotten, lonely, lost. That is his 'great calamity', the 'world-pain', the 'truth' as concen-



trated in a 'point of fire'. It is those who rise in revolt against this lamentable fact who 'matter', who 'are' for the writer Conrad: those who live through the great shock which this revelation brings them in front of our eyes, - standing up to the 'most dangerous element common to all dangers: of the crushing, paralysing sense of human littleness, which is what really defeats a man struggling with natural forces, alone..' (Nostromo p.433) It is those who follow the dream of greatness refusing to accept the insignificant part which would leave them unscathed in the scheme of things, rising after their fall, struggling on against the might of the world to their last breath, and therefore its favourite victims: the tragic heroes, men in the forefront of their kind. The spirit of strength which Conrad's whole work breathes, despite his conscious negations, is the stubborn resistance of his heroes in the face of overwhelming odds, their unconditional faith in their dream of a great destiny. They are overshadowed by the cloud of society, accompanied by their familiar devil, engulfed by the darkness of the land, and yet they fight and know how to die.

## THE SECRET OF HEARTS.

As we have seen, the centre of Conrad's creative effort is formed by the struggle of a 'soul', the seeming victory of evil in this struggle, and the futile attempt to define the nature of the force, the spirit, the 'restraint', - which makes man resist, and attempt to 'scale the height from which he has tumbled'. The elucidation of this mystery is more or less expected to enlighten the whole of human existence - to enlighten us to what man really is, and what he is consequently supposed to do in this world of ours. This is the secret of hearts:

The secret of hearts, too terrible for the timid eyes of men, shall return, veiled forever, to the Inscrutable Creator of good and evil, to the Master of doubts and impulses. His conscience was born - he heard its voice, and he hesitated, ignoring the strength within, the fateful power, the secret of his heart. It was an awful sacrifice to cast all one's life into the flame of a new belief. He wanted help against himself, against the cruel decree of salvation.

(Return, p.184)

The great moral shock, and subsequent struggle leads to a 'birth of conscience', to the upsurging of the 'secret of hearts'.

Here is in 'Return': He was beside himself with a despairing agitation, like a man informed of a deadly secret - the secret of a calamity threatening the safety of mankind. (P.136) In the flash of a thought the dishonouring episode..became purely a terrifying knowledge, an annihilating knowledge of a blind and infernal force.

(p.160)

..he was penetrated .. by the conviction that within his reach and passing away from him was the very secret of existence..

(p.176)

The revelation was terrible. He saw at once that nothing of what he knew mattered in the least. The acts of men and women, success, humiliation, dignity, failure - nothing mattered. He stood in the revealing night, - in the darkness the tries our hearts. (p.183)

It is this shattering blow which reveals the truth - the reality of evil - of the darkness - through its invasion.

In the pain of that thought was born his conscience and that fear of remorse which grows slowly, and slowly decays amongst the complicated facts of life .. a Divine wisdom springing full-grown, armed and severe, out of a tried heart, to combat the secret baseness of motives.

(p.183)

Remorse is the assertion of the spirit which comes to life at the moment of its fall. The conscience implanted in man by society and civilization is not his true one. The true one is born at the moment of surrender to evil. The central question is: is the only reality of the human heart its evil, or is there in it another reality to resist it. It is there:

That fear of remorse which grows slowly, and slowly decays amongst the complicated facts of life .. a Divine Wisdom, springing full-grown, armed and severe, out of a tried heart, to combat the secret baseness of motives.

(p.183)

This is the ultimate truth which Conrad strives to convey through his creative effort. Although evil in the world is more palpable, yet the inner self-torture of his heroes is also real, and the ultimate question and the ultimate doubt is, whether this is only due to the fear of the penalties of the violation of a sacred convention, or whether it is the punishment for a transgression against some law in man - the spirit - which is just as much reality in the human heart as Satan - and tells him to resist evil.

Heart of Darkness is the story in which Conrad aims most directly at conveying his 'truth', i.e. his doubt. It led him to the beginning of time and brought him into contact with human beings untouched by all the restraints

which civilization has meshed around the core of modern man. He and the 'pilgrims' were 'travelling in the night of the first ages (p.108),... wanderers on a prehistoric earth', on an 'unknown planet', It was 'a sorrowful land', with a 'tenebrous and passionate soul', and had 'the tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain'. (p.153) In the jungle they saw 'the prehistoric man cursing us, praying to us..' (p.108) man 'with no memories', yelling with 'black and in comprehensible frenzy'. 'It was unearthly.. you could look at a thing monstrous and free!'

The worst of it was the suspicion of their not being inhuman, the thought of their humanity and of one's own remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. (p.109) ..the dim suspicion of there being<sup>a</sup> meaning in it which you, you so remote from the night of the first ages - could comprehend.

There was in Marlow the 'faintest trace' of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise. These yells contained 'truth stripped of its cloak of time', a possibility of one's own heart, for 'the mind of man is capable of anything - because everything is in it, all the past as well as the future'. 'Let the fool gape and shudder - the man knows -. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff - with his inborn strength.' This is that which remains, because 'principles' are but 'acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags - rags that would fly off at the first good shake. You want a deliberate belief..' That is what Conrad is looking for. On the boat there is a crew of cannibals with filed teeth. 'They still belonged to the beginnings of time - had no inherited experience to teach them as it were'. They are very hungry, and have nothing to eat but some lumps of rotten hippo-meat. Marlow watches the glittering eyes of their leader rest on one of the pilgrims. 'It takes man (p.119) all his inborn strength to fight hunger

properly'. Before 'hunger - superstition, beliefs, principles.. they are less than chaff in a breeze'. And yet they do not go for the pilgrims. There is

something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there.. What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear - or some kind of primitive honour? It's really easier to face .. the perdition of one's soul - than this kind of scruple. Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me - the fact dazzling-.. an unfathomable enigma - a mystery greater -- than the curious note of desperate grief in this savage clamour that had swept by us on the river-bank.'

(pp.118-120)

Evil is the curse which burdens the whole of creation- from its very beginning - therefore the wild sorrow and grief in the aspect of the land and of its creatures, - the yells are its expression-. But the restraint in the human heart is the greater mystery.

Kurtz is the man who fell back on this stage and experienced the full reality of his heart, - who found the truth and gave it to Marlow, to harrow his soul. (pp170-172)

'True, he had made the last stride, he had stepped over the edge.' 'This man had suffered too much - forgot himself'. (p.145) And afterwards he 'pronounced judgment upon the adventures of his soul on earth'. (p.169) His soul had 'no restraint, no faith, no fear..' (p.163) It had gratified its monstrous passions' and 'yet' it was 'struggling blindly with itself'.

Both the diabolic love and the unearthly hate of the mysteries it had penetrated fought for the possession of that soul.

(p.166)

This is the 'inconceivable mystery' of his soul. Although Conrad relapses into his worst manner in the passage referred



to, still he expresses his genuine concern which has also inspired his great work. The outcome of the struggle is compressed in one word - at the moment of Kurtz's death.

Perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invincible.  
(p.170)

Kurtz's outcry is 'the horror'- meaning the 'awakening of brutal instincts' and their realization as evil at the same time - the assertion of the spirit set against the beast.

His cry .. was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory!  
(p.172)

So Kurtz had what Marlow has too; 'a voice'. (p.109)  
'I have a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced'.

What Kurtz's experience taught him, and what his voice told him, has been the uppermost maxim for Conrad's fiction and his life, - not a creed perhaps, but just a conviction just as strong:

The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells too, by Jove! - breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see? your strength comes in, the faith of your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in - your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, backbreaking business.

(Heart of Darkness, p.133)

### 3. CONRAD'S TRUTH.

Destiny. My Destiny! - Droll thing life is - that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. (H.o.D., p. 169)

In considering Conrad's fate, and that of many of his heroes, who, after having left 'home' for the sake of a dream, are 'as free as air' (Nostromo) a certain comparison offers itself. It is the image of a tame bird, living safely and sheltered and well looked after in his cage, but being discontented with the narrow space allowed to him, because it cannot use its wings, dreaming of the promise of the great freedom of the blue sky it can see beyond the window-pane. Escaping from its prison however, it is exposed to the merciless elements, not knowing their dangers or not being hard enough to resist them, attacked by the free and wild birds, and finally drowning in the terrible boundless freedom of the blue skies. Conrad had to pay heavily for the freedom of the 'unintelligible life' he had chosen, and it turned out to be fundamentally other, - men and world, - ~~and~~ than ~~itself~~ had seemed to be to the eyes of a boy drawing his knowledge from light literature. His whole work serves to make its stern reality come to us through a moral shock. Apart from the stock paraphernalia of this shock, there is always a moment when the nature of other people is revealed to us, or rather their ultimate unintelligibility. There is the revelation in:

One of these rare moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand ever so much - everything - in a flash - before we fall back again into our agreeable somnolence. I raised my eyes when he spoke, and I saw him as though I had never seen him before. (p.105)

His work is the reflection of the strife in the heart of a man of action sitting at his writing desk, confined there by his duty to keep those who depend on him alive, brooding sadly over the roots of his misfortunes, and impotently considering the fatal consequences of his extravagant indulgence in vague impulses, and suffering through them. Hence in his work the creation of a universe not real in the sense of natural, but real by the force of his language and intensely poetical through the quality of his prejudiced imagination. Hence the dismal twilight of a nightmare dream, the bitter regret over lost opportunities, the hellish glow and torture of remorse. It is the outcry of a soul too subtle and sensitive to bear this intensity of anguish and fear and unsafety. Hence his image of man as a lost and infinite fragment in a vast and cruel universe, without a place in the world of men things, struggling in overmatched littleness. Hence his bitter self-reproach that

..he has thrown his life to all the winds of heaven ..he has not known how to shelter the order and continuity of his life from his impulses, so that at times it presents itself to him as a succession of betrayals.

(H.o.D. -p.169 - a crop of unextinguishable regrets)

Hence his heroes who tumble about on earth, like leaves blown hither and thither by the winds, driven by chance in a senseless world, without hold or aim, with only the certitude of finally rotting in some gutter. Hence his craving for the spirit that should enable man to resist fear and inertia to continue his almost hopeless struggle as an image of the affirmation of this spirit in his own brave struggle. In the preface to the Nigger he comments on the creative work of the artist:

Confronted by the enigmatical spectacle the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress

and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal.

The greater part of Conrad's work can be seen as the shattering of an ideal by powers alien to it. Conrad speaks of the 'incomprehensible nature of the life that had seduced him so mysteriously'. The ideal is bound to fall because it is set up in ignorance of the dark reality of the world. In its fall it buries those who have pledged their lives to it. The central struggle is dictated by the revolt and hate against this dark reality - and the love frustrated for the ideal of light. It is made visible in the irreconcilable enmity of the powers of the dark to the spirit of light. The human beings involved carry both in their hearts: They are ever so many shapes of adaption to the darkness of the world, and draw their attitude from its bitter realisation and from the revolt against it.

The immediate consequence of this clash is the waning and disappearance of the moral reality of the characters, and their ultimate disintegration: absolute moral isolation.- This is stressed over and over again in Conrad's work in direct statements as well as in the grouping and opposition of characters who are shown to be utterly out of each other's reach. They become unreal to themselves; other people are but shifting mists and clouds to them, the whole world is but a phantom - shifting shapes without a real core: -All seems illusion.

It is when we try to grapple with another man's intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering, and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun. It is as if loneliness were a hard and absolute condition of existence.

Death, the great consolation and the great peace, tempts the victims and all action becomes futile and vain. Life

seems a curse which forces man to exist in this hell and live by its 'cruel strength'. Reason seems a curse since it shows man his fallen state so clearly, raising the impossible questions of good and evil, or right and wrong. Imagination seems to be 'the father of all terrors', by giving man the dream of a world better than it can ever be. Hope seems an infernal illusion - all values seem to be lies in the face of reality. This is the great negation which Conrad would seem to preach consciously to us. In his work Conrad presents only one aspect of the reality of modern society, - its outskirts and its underworld -. It may perhaps, like his exceptional individualities, reflect symptomatically a truth which is, in varying degrees, valid for the whole. Although Conrad's creed seems to be but a negation of creeds, he is in that, typical of our time, 'a man in its forefront', rendering its truth by being what the 'man of sensations' in Nostromo or in Victory is: 'a victim of a faithless age', with all the sufferings implied.

Whatever the truth of Conrad's negations may be, he had his finger on the pulse of his time. His 'unrelated existence' is a 'common fate' nowadays. The great disturbances of the first half of this century have caused fundamental changes in the outlook of their victims. Large movements of population have caused a general loss of tradition and convention. People had to leave their homes by force or in search of a means of existence. The prevailing feeling was one of homelessness, loneliness, unsafety and fear. Conrad has anticipated these conditions of existence and reflected the 'consciousness of the world', the 'the sentiment of existence' of modern man. This aspect of Conrad's work also determines its value in as far as it may be evaluated apart from the quality of its artistic expression. It is his vision of a world in a confusion of values which makes



it a valuable artistic document of our times.

It is evident that Conrad's vision, rendered with such earnestness of purpose and imaginative force of expression, if well understood, represents a dire prophecy of a plight approaching civilized mankind. It is equally evident that as such it could not rouse enthusiasm amongst his contemporaries, who were too complacent in their safe and settled ways of life to give credit to one who untiringly held the omens of a coming disaster before their eyes. Cassandra was not even loved by her brothers - and Conrad quarrelled with his excellent friend Cunninghame Graham. Paul Wiley speaks of:

the evidence that the subject as well as the design of many of Conrad's stories reflects the mood of transition and intellectual conflict around the turn of the century.

We have by now the results of investigations into the effects which a homeless wandering life has on the individual. The doctor in 'H.o.D.', in 'the interests of science', measures the 'crania' of all 'who go out there'. (Marlow included -, pp.55-56) The symptoms detected are not the consequence of low mentality, -those 'who go out there' are usually gifted above average-, but exclusively the effect of migration and transition in modern society. The flow of population is generally caused by ecological factors of symbiotic character, which emerge from a process of competition. In their wake the old traditional and deep-rooted forms of stable society, which were mainly based upon consensus-relations, on mutual affection and sentiment-, were disorganized and destroyed. The effects of migration and high mobility on man were: Individualization, Secularization and Isolation. In other words it is the dissolution of hallowed bonds, customs, morals and conventions.

The result was that standards of behaviour which are normally built up in families and stable communities, -of vital importance for the development of integral personalities -, disintegrated.

These symptoms are typical aspects of the 'common fate' in Conrad's work.

It was however Conrad's particular fate more than these extraneous influences which gave his work its singular stamp. Heyst in Victory comments on his father:

I suppose he began like other people; took fine words for good, ringing coins and noble ideas for valuable banknotes. He was a great master of both himself, by the way. Later he discovered - how am I to explain it to you? Suppose the world were a factory and all mankind workmen in it. Well he discovered that the wages were not good enough, that they were paid in counterfeit money.

It wasn't a new discovery, but he brought his capacity for scorn to bear on it. It was immense. It ought to have withered this globe. I don't know how many minds he convinced. But my mind was very young then, and youth I suppose can be easily seduced, - even by a negation. He was very ruthless and yet he was not without pity. He dominated me without difficulty. A heartless man could not have done so. Even to fools he was not utterly merciless. He could be indignant, but he was too great for flouts and jeers. What he said was not meant for the crowd; it could not be; and I was flattered to find myself among the elect. They read his books -- it was irresistible. It was as if that mind were taking me into its confidence, giving me a special insight into its mastery of despair. Mistake, no doubt. There is something of my father in every man who lives long enough.

(Victory, pp.197,221)

Apart from showing childhood influences this is, from Conrad, an excellent self-characterization. It shows his 'turn of mind' with unusual detachment.

In the preface to the Mirror he connects the conflicting elements in his fiction, - the romantic dream on the one hand, and the 'hard facts' on the other -, with his

temperament and experience:

..hard work and exacting calls of duty (are) things which in themselves are not much charged with a feeling of romance. If those things appeal strongly to me even in retrospect it is, I suppose, because the romantic feeling of reality was in me an inborn faculty. This in itself may be a curse but when disciplined by a sense of personal responsibility and a recognition of the hard facts of existence shared with the rest of mankind becomes but a point of view from which the very shadows of life appear endowed with an internal glow. It is none the worse for the knowledge of truth.

(Mirror, p.153)

His characters are vessels for his romantic feeling and at the same time for his sardonic irony and all of them have that fatal rift which has afflicted the author through his experience. Their fates must consequently prove that reality is stronger than the dream.

F.R. Leavis, tells us of his 'exasperation' at the 'imputed profundity' of Conrad, and that this 'profundity' was not what it was taken to be, and the reverse of a strength'. He calls it

something simply and obviously deplorable, - something that presents itself, not as an elusively noble timbre prompting us to analysis and consequent limiting judgments, but as, bluntly, a disconcerting weakness or vice.

(The Great Tradition, pp.173-174)

We have already considered the flaws in Conrad's fiction, which were caused by his obsession with certain aspects of human existence. This obsession was however the very source of his creative surge, and to blame him for his 'imputed profundity' means as much as blaming him for having written at all. We have to take the flaws for the sake of the greatness that is connected with them. E.M. Forster thinks

that Conrad's 'secret casket of genius contains a vapor rather than a jewel; and that we needn't try to write

him down philosophically, because there is, in this direction, nothing to write. No creed, in fact. Only opinions, and the right to throw them overboard when facts make them look absurd.

This sounds unfair to Conrad. A piece of fiction is not a philosophical essay, and there is a lot to say about deep thought which is expressed through poetical means - through a layer of imagery. Admittedly Conrad did not confess to a definite creed, but there is, at the core of his books, not a vapour, but a tremendous strength, affirming life without the support of a creed, and therefore the stronger. Greater minds than Conrad's have been appalled and revolted at the reality of evil and have sought explanations for it. Not all of them have sought refuge in a creed. If we are not offered a creed then we are at least assured of the presence of the spirit pitched against the evil in this world.

## CONCLUSION.

The intrinsic coherence of method and vision is apparent throughout Conrad's work. The focus of his creative interest is the revelation of the substance of the human heart with all its bearing on the truth of human society and of the universe in which man lives. The human heart is seen in universal relations, -the strife in a heart goes on all through creation. Action is of secondary importance as it is but the outcome of this struggle and its value not fixed until the core of the struggle is resolved.

Conrad is as much out to show something as to find something. What he wants to show is his radical doubt as to the substance of the human heart and of the world, as opposed to the current conventional notions. What he wants to find is a solution to this doubt. His books are as much studies as they are illustrations. With this aim Conrad tries to show 'life in its true form and colour'. He consciously adapted the form of his fiction to the way life presented itself to him.

In Conrad's time, Europe had come to a climax of a long development of thought and beliefs. Man lived in a world which he believed to be perfectly enlightened by reason, as to its substance, origin and aims. There was evil, but it was clearly defined as such. Demonic forces, beyond the bounds of reason, did no longer exist. Civilization had its institutions which provided a place for everybody in this world. There was no real problem about about the questions of wrong and right, good and evil, nor as to the destiny of man and his place in the next



world. The laws of society and the commandments of religion saw to that. Mankind in general was making steady material progress which was to go hand in hand with moral improvement. Its light was being carried to the dark continents by pioneers and missionaries, -trade in the wake of Christianity and humanity.

All this, through a frightful moral shock, turned out to be a terrible illusion for Conrad. Civilization showed itself to be a monster preying for its existence on mankind with a cruelty and savagery surpassing that of the primitives. Taking the virtues of western civilization on the strength of their manifestation when bereft of the hold of convention, he saw them as hollow, -a pretence covering the same darkness which he found in the primitives. Life became for him a 'play with an obscure beginning and an unfathomable dénouement' ( to Arthur Simons, Aug. 29, 1908). The values of society, by their manifestations, having been proved as false, the question arose as to whether all morality was nothing but a convention built up in the course of centuries. He saw nature as a cruel play of blind forces which assert themselves with violence and savagery, -forces which are also in the human heart. In Stein's butterfly 'the balance of colossal forces' shows the 'perfect equilibrium of the mighty Kosmos' (Lord Jim, p.152), but man does not fit into it. The forces in him are not in harmony but in eternal conflict. Man cannot follow the forces of nature, because something in him is pitched against them. The conception of man as the incarnation of such a blind force is the reason for despair, - the suspicion that he is no more than a 'handful of dust'. The redeeming fact for this despair, -and the cause of his suffering at the same time-, is the existence of a force in the human heart which counter-acts

✓ chaos. It is not a mere convention but an inborn reality. The search for it is the permanent inspiration for Conrad's creative effort through the medium of fiction, -all his writing revolves unceasingly around it.

Despair itself is a proof that man does not fit into this order of things, -despair taken as the extremity of suffering in the human heart under its inhuman conditions.

Those who suffer most from it are therefore proof of the existence of the spirit. The sorrow and grief in the clamour of prehistoric man expresses the revolt against the slavery of these blind forces. There is the dream of light and order in the heart of man which is bound to stand in irreconcilable enmity with chaos, -its bearers are vessels of the spirit pitched against it, and therefore privileged victims of its forces. The human heart contains the past and the future, the savagery and the dream, and it is always in the clash of these two that the spirit affirms itself, mostly at the cost of destruction. The birth of a true conscience, -the assertion of a strong knowledge and force set against chaos, through suffering-, is the central theme.

Conrad's obscurity lies in the fact that the spirit never finds clear form of expression. He only affirms that it must resist evil and is incompatible with material ends, but it never matures to a definite rule of conduct, - except 'that we must live decently to go out easy'. The gates of the beyond are closed in his view. We only learn that it is the manner which counts, the 'honour'. One thing however is clear: The spirit cannot assert itself through violence and savagery, - they are against the spirit, and therefore it is of necessity weaker. But even so it cannot be wholly overcome. The spirit

must not however tie itself down to matter, or it is in danger of being overcome. The question where it belongs to if this world is too bad for it, is consciously shirked. It is only in the bond of the sea that it has found a definite expression. Therefore all Conrad's fiction dealing with that form of life is conclusive in vision and structure, as we have already pointed out. The rest of his fiction is ruled by the central question which remains open apart from the affirmation of the spirit, - inconclusive in action, and therefore in form. Conrad had no coherent view of reality, except for the certitude of this universal struggle going right through creation. Therefore the form of his fiction remains 'open'. It does not show a coherent and chronological action leading to a definite and meaningful end, because action is ultimately futile, as seen from its purpose. Since the spirit does only assert itself in conflict with darkness at the moment of its defeat, this always stands at the beginning. There is no doubt about the outcome. The truth turns out in the struggle of light and darkness in the heart of the central character. Therefore all other characters are grouped around him and light up this struggle. He is their touch-stone, since they are all qualified by the moral stand they take in this struggle, each according to his own substance. Time and place do not matter. The outstanding quality of his fiction, as well as its flaws, is caused by his revolt and bewilderment in the face of existence. In the beginning, when his art of grouping was not sufficiently mastered, he was talkative about his truth and there was a layer of explanatory comment diluting its dramatic quality, - which was thin anyway because the strife displayed was of a merely spiritual and moral nature, not presented in terms of action. It was the revelation of the fall, the revolt, and the resistance of a soul. This comment, in the cause of his writing grew thin, but it never disappeared. His sarcasm, a cloak for

his revolt, gradually shifted into the denominations used for visual details. Also, there was a thick layer of description with an abundance of denominations and adjectival qualifications which serve to establish universal relations for the strife displayed. With the progress of his art, Conrad succeeded in showing all he wanted to show exclusively through his grouping and lighting. Characters set beside each other in absolute ignorance as to the reality of those next to them, demonstrate the absolute loneliness and solitude of every human soul, - the fact that it has to fight its struggle alone, thrown on its own substance. There is no help from God or man. This is brought out strongest through the opposition of the blind trust of the primitive in the face of the treachery of the white man. It also serves as the strongest means of irony.

The central situation then is the fall of the man in whose heart the birth of the spirit is to take place. It is there at the beginning, and the action leading up to it elucidates it, like all the characters involved. In the great novels there are several such characters throwing light upon each other.

We can now proceed to outline our thesis on the grounds of our investigation. For the sake of greater clarity, we shall make use of minor simplifications.

Conrad's vision is of one cast throughout his work, and is emphasized by a current layer of description. Most of his narratives lead to a definite end: a moral victory. By the way in which this victory is attained, we can roughly distinguish two groups of narratives: in the one, - his sea-stories -, the moral victory is attained by competent coherent and purposeful action; in the second, - his novels on the land-, it is bought at the price of failure of action, and of a moral



downfall. In the first group we have therefore a more or less conventional, compact story; in the second, all action becomes futile through its purpose and subsequent failure, and the story is torn up and subjected to a point of view beyond mere action. The attitude of the ironic onlooker, expressed through a constant, - often irretating -, layer of comment, never doubts the fact of the moral victory. His irony stoops before it. It accounts for much ambiguity in the meaning of the action, and if we disregard it, we can identify the two groups of stories with two definite types:

There are first the men like MacWhirr or the young Russian, men of simple faith, for whom the value of their action is never doubted. Consequently they are immune to the destructive forces which could question the sense of their devotion. They are invincible in their simple and unconditional resistance and survive the 'supreme test' of their strength to which they are put by the straight and terrible sea.

There are secondly men like Kurtz, - men with imagination and 'ideas' which lay them open to doubt. They are beset by demons of the wilderness and by devils of society, and they do not survive the 'supreme test'. At the moment of their downfall, their story in the conventional manner is dropped, (in the novels) and torn up into episodes from different times and places, in the manner explained above. Action for them becomes futile, and the writer proceeds to an examination of the moral facts underlying their fall, up to the point of their destruction, when their moral re-assertion occurs. Their story reflects the confusion of values which results from their failure.

The Nigger of the Narcissus is a narrative which stands between these two definite groups, showing the invasion of



the 'spirit of the land' on the sea,- being neither short-story nor a novel-.

If we take a close look at the sailor and poet in the background, we can say that the simple moral painting in black and white is done by the sailor, and the cloak of ambiguity which makes light of it, produced by the cynical poet. Disregarding the ironic asides of the poet we can say, that the whole moral evaluation of men and spectacle is based on the outlook of the man of the sea (most of the heroes are 'one of us'), confronted by the appalling complications of the life on land which he comes to realize in a terrible shock. In a simplified statement the nature of this shock can be called the discovery of evil, and it is followed by the re-assertion of the spirit. It is the moral significance of the action then which determines the form in which it is presented to us. On these grounds, as established by our investigation, we can now state our thesis: In structure and vision, the story is, for Joseph Conrad, the creative medium for conveying a moral discovery.

APPENDIX.

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